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CREATIVE POWER  
*Through* DISCUSSION

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# CREATIVE POWER *Through* DISCUSSION

By THOMAS FANSLER

Author of *Discussion Methods for Adult Groups*,  
*Teaching Adults by Discussion*, *Effective Group  
Discussion*



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# **INTRODUCTION**

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## CHAPTER 1

### WHY THIS BOOK WAS WRITTEN

Whenever you see two or three people together, the chances are they are talking. People are always talking. Talking and talking. You probably have just finished talking with someone before you took up this book to read. The ability to talk is one characteristic that distinguishes man from other animals. Some people seem to talk sense and some people seem just to babble. In some groups the conversation or discussion seems to have direction and meaning, while in other groups it is a bull session.

Can you learn how to make your conversation mean something? Can you learn how to discuss an important question of company policy? Can you learn to sift the wheat from the chaff of the daily chatter-chatter? Can you, through practicing good discussion techniques, learn to make our American democracy work better?

The answer is Yes. A little time and patience and study will make you a better talker, will make you a better listener, will help you to understand people and get along with them better.

The rules are simple, and to state them is easy. In fact, the rules are so simple as to seem obvious to you. But the practice of the rules—that is something else again. You know the old

saying: "Practice makes perfect." I certainly don't expect you to become a perfect conversationalist simply from reading this book, but I can assure you that if you will practice on the important points discussed here you will find yourself doing better than even you dreamed possible. I know this is true because those who have worked with me in my classes have proved it for themselves.

There are other books in the field, good books, books that I have recommended. Your public library has them. My students have read them. But my students have come back to me time and time again and said, "These other books don't tell us what we learn from your classes—how to get along with people." They have said, "We think you have to learn to be a good teammate before you can be captain." They have said, "You can't be king-pin in every situation. What can group members learn about working together and getting something done no matter who is chairman?"

Now, these are adult students who are not taking the work for any college or high school credit. They come to the classes because they want to learn. They are from all walks of life, businessmen and career girls, artisans and brain workers, club-women and engineers, personnel men and factory workers, teachers and nurses, housewives and, yes, even psychiatrists. In age they run from the late teens to the sixties. They all recognize that the business of living in this complicated world demands that we learn how to live and work together co-operatively. They recognize that we work together in groups, usually small groups, and that co-operative thinking in reaching a group decision is essential to our American democracy whether these decisions pertain to international affairs, governmental

activities, business policy and management, union activities, or even such comparatively small questions as the program for the annual meeting of one's local club. Almost every day each of us finds himself in the position of having to work out our common problems with other people.

This book, then, was written for my students. It is an attempt to set down some of the answers they themselves helped to work out, answers to some of the many problems of thinking and working together as Americans. Whatever is of real value in the book comes from them, and they would be the first to admit that they don't know all the answers. They have been humble about what they did know, trying patiently to fit together pieces of their experience and knowledge to form techniques which will make them more effective human beings in their relations with other human beings. If you will work along with them and try to put into practice the points learned you will find, as my students have found, that as *you understand people better you are a more effective individual.*

Many years of experience in studying and teaching discussion techniques have convinced me that the job of making your talk mean something is essentially easy. You can do it. You can learn to make your ideas count. You can make your voice heard, along with the voices of your neighbors down the street. You don't need a college education, you don't need a string of professional degrees after your name, in order to become a really effective individual and an influence for good in our American democracy. You and a hundred million other adults like you.

Curiously, most of the things you need to know are already known to you. It's just that you haven't thought of these points

in connection with this topic. But in addition to knowing you must make a conscious effort to put them into practice. If you will but make that conscious effort, and for every mistake try that much harder, you will succeed.

And it can be interesting and fun learning how to do it.

## CHAPTER 2

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### WHY CONFERENCES FAIL

#### "SAME OLD STUFF"

Let us take a look at some group meetings and see what happens. Call them "conferences" if you will, call them "discussion groups," call them "town meetings," call them "just a few friends in for the evening." They all have at least this much in common, they are groups of people meeting together and talking together. And there is some purpose behind their talk.

Why is it that so many such meetings accomplish nothing? Why do so many end with people being dissatisfied? Sometimes even disgusted? "It's the same old stuff," you hear them say. You've said it yourself when walking out of a committee meeting, a lot of palaver and no real meat. "Discussion is a great waste of time," a famous lecturer once said to me, "because the members of the group are only pooling their ignorance. You will never get wisdom from bringing ignorant people together and letting them talk."

I expect that you're inclined to agree with him. At times I have felt the same way. Certainly you have experienced talk-talk-talk that never seems to get anywhere. You have come away from committee meetings vowing that you will never attend another. Usually, though, you break down—especially



when a friend (or the boss!) urges you to go. So you go. And what happens?

### THE USUAL PATTERN

The topic or the subject is presented by one of the group, usually the chairman, some questions are asked, some comments are made, some criticisms and objections are raised, old So-and-so may go into a long and rambling reminiscence about how things were done in the old days, someone may crack a joke (if the atmosphere is informal), someone takes a pot shot at the work or ideas of a member, he defends himself and may crack back, someone else (maybe the chairman) says despairingly, "But we have to get this question settled!" All agree that the problem is important. Some say they want to get down to fundamentals but falter when asked just what they mean by "fundamentals." One person looks at his watch and says that he has to go and adds that he is willing to leave the question to the judgment of the chairman, and the meeting breaks up.

You have been on committees, you have attended business "conferences," you have been on planning boards, you have been at "policy" meetings, you have tried to plan programs, you have been in discussion sessions. Isn't the above the usual pattern for such meetings? And if at the last minute of such a meeting, a subcommittee is hastily appointed to "study the question and report back to the larger group"—has anything much been accomplished? Will not the subcommittee go through much the same gyrations? And will not the subcommittee finally name one person to draft a report and present it?

No wonder the dictator nations sneer at democracies. No wonder that we sometimes in our secret hearts long for a "strong" leader who will issue orders so that we may get some-

thing done. But even though dictators sneer and even though we may sometimes despair at the seeming slowness of group thinking and group working together, take heart. You can do something about it. You and your friends and those you work with.

### HELP MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK

You can help make democracy work. What we need in our America is not less talking things over but more—and better—discussion on current problems. What we need is not fewer conferences but more effective conference participation.

You can learn how to be more effective in discussion. You can learn what happens to individuals in a group. You can learn how to be an effective working member of a group, and you can learn how to be an effective group chairman. And as you learn and as you put into practice what you have learned, you will discover that you can help make things happen. You will discover in yourself and in your neighbors new powers you had not dreamed of. You will discover that meetings and conferences and discussions—and even your informal conversations—need no longer be the same old stuff, need no longer be just a waste of time. You can get something done.

### PURPOSE IS ONE KEY

Everybody likes to have a reason for doing things. Possibly the very best reason for doing something is that you like it and enjoy it. Possibly the worst reason is that you have to do it. Between these extremes lies a whole range of good reasons and poor reasons, acceptable and unacceptable, reasons that spur your imagination and reasons that leave you cold and indifferent.

Many conferences or discussion meetings fail because there seems to be no common purpose, or at any rate no purpose that most of the group members will accept as a good and valid reason for their being present and contributing their time and energy. Don't forget that when you go to a meeting you are expending your time and energy. You have to have a reason for this expense.

You may go because you think you will get something from it. You may go because you feel that your special knowledge will be helpful. You may go because you think the subject is important. You may go hoping that the discussion will throw some light upon the problems you have been struggling with. You may go because you think you ought to, because your friends have persuaded you. Finally, you may have to go. Perhaps your boss has told you to go, or perhaps it is just a routine part of your job.

Whatever the meeting or whatever the group, there will always be a variety of reasons why the individuals in the group are present. How, then, out of this variety are you going to get any common purpose? For unless there is some common purpose the meeting will surely not accomplish all that it might. How can the interest of indifferent members be sparked? How can the runaway enthusiasms of some be directed toward the good of all?

Speaking of runaway enthusiasms, I remember an old fellow, nice looking and well dressed, who used to come to discussion meetings held in our town library. Whenever he got a chance, and whatever the subject being discussed, he would always wind up by expounding his conviction that the world was soon coming to an end. Once he even interrupted a village meeting on the subject of zoning by stating that we were troubling

ourselves unnecessarily because the end of the world would be upon us before we got the question settled. How often, too, have you known people of whom it is said, "Don't get So-and-so started on the subject of . . . [whatever it is], you'll never hear the end of it!" These enthusiasms are good. It is good to have special interests and to have at least one subject that you are expert in. None of us can be experts in all fields and it is hard enough to learn all we would like about one field. But do not let your enthusiasms run away with you. Learn to curb your special interest and to focus your attention upon the problem at hand.

#### FOCUSING ATTENTION

The focusing of attention upon the problem at hand is partly the responsibility of the chairman.

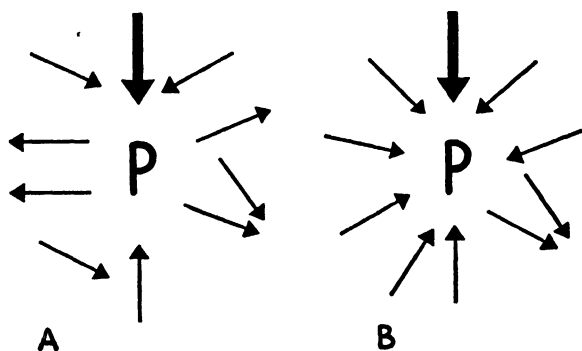


FIG. I

Look for a moment at Fig. I. In situation A we have represented a typical group at the opening of a conference discussion. The chairman, represented by the broad arrow, has his mind on the problem (P), while the thoughts and desires of the other group members may be as scattered as the other

arrows indicate. In B we have represented a fairly successful introduction of the problem and opening statement by the chairman. The attention of all but two of the group members is focused on the problem (P). These two may remain interested in their own thoughts for some time to come, but the chairman should persist in trying to turn these two toward the common topic.

Have you ever noticed how a successful chairman will look at first one person and then another in the group as he announces the topic and the purpose of the meeting? Has it seemed to you that he was speaking directly at you? Has it seemed as if he was deliberately dragging in your special knowledge and abilities and mentioning briefly how they fitted into the picture? Have you noticed that he seemed to do the same thing with each of the others? Have you noticed that he stressed the importance of the topic to you and the work you are interested in? If the chairman is successful he is doing all these things and doing them deliberately. What he is trying to accomplish in the first few minutes is to give each one present a good and valid reason for being present, and for focusing his attention upon the problem being discussed.

A board meeting that I attended recently was started off in just the opposite way. The chairman put his feet on the desk in front of him (perhaps to show the informality of the setting). As he announced the topic he looked down at his hands. While he was talking in a low, monotonous voice, he played with a hangnail on one of his fingers and finally got out his knife and clipped it off. Then with an abrupt lifting of his head, he said, "Well, what about it?"

Silence. None of us opened our mouths.

Not only had he failed to give us any reason for being there,

he had also failed to spark our interest, and he had—without realizing what he was doing—succeeded in focusing our attention upon not his words but rather upon his hangnail!

The situation can be illustrated as in Fig. II where the arrows representing the group members are pointed not toward the problem (P) but toward the chairman!

The meeting finally got under way, but only lamely, when one of the members ventured some remarks. But our hearts were not really in it. The chairman had himself set the tone of

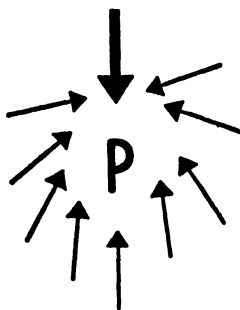


FIG. II

indifference, and try as we would the rest of us could hardly rise above it.

Emphasis on good and valid motivation and focusing attention on the problem will help develop the necessary mutuality of purpose. But the chairman can't do all the job. It is up to each member to do his share. Remember: unless there is some unity of purpose there can be no meeting of the minds. And perhaps there should be no meeting at all!

### How's YOUR RADIO?

Some unity of purpose is essential, but even with the best will in the world some conferences and discussions fail because our

receivers are not working. Nature has given us two good pairs of receivers in our eyes and our ears. Lots of people make poor use of them, and unfortunately our modern system of education seems to have trained us almost to neglect one set entirely—our ears. What is the matter with using your ears?

There seems to be an unfortunate opinion abroad that a discussion consists mostly of talk. That is about 99 per cent wrong. Consider the case of ten persons at a conference discussion. Only one is talking at any one time—or only one should be. What are the others doing? Presumably they are using their ears to listen. We will take up the topic of good listening in the next chapter, but I would like to emphasize now that many conference discussions fail simply because the members fail to listen. When your audience stops listening, you might just as well not talk. The only individuals that I know who go on talking when they know that nobody is listening are either inmates of the state hospital or candidates for same.

### MEANINGLESS CHATTER

In addition to not listening well, we do not broadcast well. By this I am not referring to “um-ing” and “ah-ing” and fumbling for words as we talk, although that does have a lot to do with the effectiveness of what we say. No, I am referring to the fact that in a group situation most of us talk “off the tops of our heads” rather than with our hearts and minds. We are inclined to talk just for the sake of saying something rather than speaking what has real meaning for us as individuals.

You know the chatter-chatter-chatter that is associated with a tea party or an informal social gathering. In your teens you learned that the way to handle yourself in such a situation was to develop a “line” and whenever necessary to turn on the

"line" and let the conversation go where it would. It seems not to matter *what* you say, just so long as you keep saying something.

In this connection the story is told of a young debutante who greeted each of her guests as they came down the receiving line with: "So nice to see you. My aunt has just died." Invariably each guest replied, "So nice. Yes, it's a lovely party, isn't it?"

In many social gatherings the more you chatter the greater a success you are. To paraphrase W. S. Gilbert: "The meaning doesn't matter if it's only idle chatter of a simple, harmless kind!" The "transcendental kind" of chatter, Mr. Gilbert, is out of place in our modern social whirl, although the "line" that some men and women adopt calls for a string of high-sounding words, each of which would require a book to explain.

Many conference discussions are keyed on about the level of a cocktail party, and the idea seems to be to get everybody talking at a furious pace whether what is said means little or nothing. Remember: if it's chatter, it doesn't matter; if it doesn't matter, it's chatter.

### "I DISAGREE WITH WHAT YOU SAY"

If there were no differences of opinion in a conference discussion there would be little discussion. Differences of opinion are wanted in a discussion, and the skillful leader or chairman tries to bring them out. If we are all agreed upon a certain course of action and all agreed upon the way it is to be done, the time is ripe for action, not for words.

But sometimes, and perhaps more often than you think until you begin to study people in groups, differences of opinion conceal unspoken antagonisms among the group members. Differences of opinion may be based also upon certain fixed ideas,



or mind-sets, or habits of thought. From your own experience you can illustrate what I mean. You know many persons who will disagree with, say, Mrs. Jones no matter what she says. Even if she remarks on the nice weather they will disagree possibly because they simply do not like her.

I do not love thee, Doctor Fell,  
The reason why I cannot tell;  
But this alone I know full well;  
I do not love thee, Doctor Fell.

In this case the poet is far more outspoken than we usually are in our dealings with other people. If we don't happen to like that Dr. Fell, whoever he may be, we are not going to like what he says, and we tend to disagree with him immediately. The more we dislike him the more sharply we disagree with what he has to say. If there are a couple of Dr. Fells serving on the same committee with you, the chairman is going to have a hard time getting a smooth, harmonious working team out of his group.

But even if you like a person you may disagree with his point of view. You may think he's all wrong. You may think that if he'd only had your years of experience he would swing to your way of thinking. And he may think the same thing about you. The point is, any topic that is important and has meaning for the group is bound to bring out differences of opinion. Indeed, in order to have a thorough airing of the subject, it is necessary for these differences to be brought out.

Conferences sometimes fail in just this manner; not all points of view are brought to light and thoroughly aired and threshed out. Again, there may be superficial agreement overlying fundamental conflicts and antagonisms, like the thin coating of autumn ice over the depths of a frog pond. Sufficient to say at

this point that many conferences and many meetings fail to accomplish what they might because of these conflicts and antagonisms which later may break out and nullify the earlier achievements of the group. Skaters, beware, the ice may be very thin indeed, and the currents underneath strong enough to sweep you under.

### TRAINING NEEDED

Finally, conferences may fail for yet another reason. They may fail because the group members have not been trained in conference discussion methods. The leader, too, being a member of the group, may lack the necessary techniques. And so we come around again to the purpose of this book: to help you learn how to become a good group member and a good group leader or chairman.

Because of its primary importance in all group situations we will take up first the topic of how to become a good group member. The training you may give yourself along these lines will stand you in good stead all your life, whether or not you are ever called upon to assume a position of leadership.



## PART I

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# How to Be a Good Group Member



## CHAPTER 3

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### LISTEN AS WELL AS TALK

#### GOOD TALKERS A DIME A DOZEN

There is no magic touchstone to success in any line. Yet if there is one thing that comes closer than anything else to making you popular, not only with the opposite sex but also with your own, it is the faculty of listening. You know the definition of a bore: one who talks about himself so much that he gives you no chance to talk about yourself. Probably there is no more exasperating person in the world than one who is just waiting for you to finish a sentence or pause for a breath so that he can break in. You have seen him often, his eyes wide open and alert—not to your words and your meaning but to your breathing. He nods his head vigorously. His mouth is slightly open so as not to lose that precious instant of time to part his lips for the first word.

*He doesn't hear a word you say.*

You might just as well be talking to a stone wall for all the effect you get for the energy expended. Good listeners are rare; good talkers a dime a dozen.

Robert Frost's refrain "Good fences make good neighbors" we might paraphrase as regards group discussion. We would say, "Good listeners make good neighbors," for listening is primarily

a friendly, neighborly thing. We like the good listener. We like the person who will give us a chance to get our ideas off our chest without constantly diverting the stream of our thought. We like the person who *hears* what we have to say.

The number one rule of good group discussion, of good conference technique, of good ordinary human relations, is "Listen as well as talk."

Let us examine that idea for a moment. First of all you will say to me, "But I do listen!" To test yourself on this point, see if you can repeat in your own words the central idea in the mind of the next person who talks to you. Perhaps if you are intent about it and are consciously testing yourself you will do better than ordinarily. But when you are not consciously testing yourself you probably do not hear more than a third of what is said to you. Perhaps not even that much, as you will quickly discover when you try to tell someone else what the other person has just said.

Listening is not easy. Listening takes active effort. To become a good listener takes practice, and I am going to suggest some ways in which you can learn. But first let us look at some of the reasons why listening is important.

### WHAT GOOD LISTENING DOES FOR YOU

If you are among a group of friends in conference you presumably wish to learn something about the subject being discussed. I have known a few paragons. They know everything about everything. They are not present at the meeting to learn something but to show off how much they know, and if you let them, they will tell you.

Well, why not let them? Why not let them tell you something you may not know? If you are like most people you probably know at least a little about the subject being discussed,

and a little more won't hurt you. What that little more does for you may be to throw light on some part of the subject you had forgotten or neglected. The experience of the other person (even if he does seem to know it all) is not the same as your experience, nor is his study of the subject exactly the parallel of yours. You might think that you have asked yourself all the important questions to be asked on the subject only to find that a chance remark by someone else suddenly throws the whole problem into new focus or perspective.

I once attended a committee meeting where we were planning an entertainment program for a club meeting. All of us on the committee had some pretty good ideas, and we were whipping together what we considered a good entertainment when suddenly one of the committee asked, "Are there going to be any guests of the club at this meeting?" A simple question. One that we should have thought of, but we just hadn't. The point of the story is that, while we had been working along blithely thinking of features that we might enjoy, we had completely forgotten that the original purpose of the meeting was the entertainment of some special guests.

Suppose we hadn't listened. Suppose our friend's question (which we hadn't asked ourselves) had got lost in the babble of conversation or had been smothered by the insistence of one person that his suggestions prevail. The result would have meant failure in the original purpose of the meeting. The committee chairman's reaction was instantaneous. "Bless your heart, Charlie," he said. "That's the very reason we are having the meeting, and a point we had overlooked."

#### HELP ON KNOTTY PROBLEMS

Have you ever had the experience of struggling with a problem that somehow would not shape itself into questions and



ideas that you could get hold of? Have you ever noticed that suddenly the whole pattern comes clear? (Not necessarily the answers, but the pattern of how to get the answers.) Many times I have sat in conferences not quite sure just what I did think about the problem being discussed, my own thinking confused, my reasons muddled and unsatisfactory. As one and another in the group expressed their opinions or asked questions I may have grown even more bewildered. Then suddenly one of the group asks the question I had not thought of. His slant on the problem, based on his particular experience, seems just the key piece to the jigsaw puzzle in my mind. The pieces start going together! If you are anything like me, you are grateful to that person . . . not for solving the problem for you but for showing you where that one little piece of information fitted in.

Now, if I had been intent on getting my questions asked or on putting my ideas over, I probably would not have even heard what he said. Even if I had heard but had not been listening, I might not have caught the significance.

"Oh, I see now! What you've just said puts an entirely different aspect on the matter!" Have you ever had that happen to you? If so, it occurred only because you *listened* to what someone else had to say. It was *his* experience and *his* remark and *his* question that let loose a whole flood of new light upon a murky situation.

#### RELEASE FROM TENSIONS

Problems can be fun to solve, but problems also create a mass of tensions and turmoil within our minds. They can bother us almost to death. When the problem is solved and a clear course of action indicated and begun, the release of these tensions is a blessed release indeed. Thus when there are several of you

gathered together working on the same problem (and it is a real problem for you, one that means something) it pays to listen to what the rest of the group have to say.

That sounds as though I meant that a group conference was wordless! Not at all. There will be plenty of talk going on, but no matter who is talking, try hard to listen to what he says. Never mind if you think you've heard it all before. Never mind if it is the usual old bore spouting off. Listen. Never mind if it is that young squirt who has been on the staff only six months. Listen. Even if you are supposed to be the expert and have given more thought to the problem than anybody else, listen. The only way you can get the benefit of what they can offer is to listen to what they say. If you expect the same courtesy from them when you are talking, afford the rest the courtesy you expect. But it is not simply a matter of courtesy, it is also of direct benefit to you. You want and need that release from tension which decision and action alone can bring.

### WHAT LISTENING DOES TO YOUR OPPONENT

Sometime you will find yourself in a group meeting where there is strong opposition to the course that you yourself favor. What are you to do? Shout the opposition down? Outtalk them?

I suggest that the next time this situation occurs with you, you try this simple expedient. *Try to outlisten your opponent rather than to outtalk him.* Just try it once and see what happens.

If your experience is anything like mine, you will discover an interesting fact in human relations. Active listening on your part tends to disarm your opponent. He will start off by being quite sure that he is right (as you are sure of your rightness, of course). As he talks, if you interrupt him or try to outtalk him,

he will be more than ever convinced of his rightness. But if you are listening hard, and if you show him you are listening hard, his feelings toward you will change.

### THE MOST WONDERFUL GIRL

The reason is simple. You have practiced it in other connections . . . or have had it practiced on you. In conference we forget what we already know about people.

Let me ask you this question: who is the most wonderful girl in the world or who is the most wonderful man? And how did you discover this? Don't think she snared you with subtle perfumes or that he overwhelmed you with bushels of roses. No. She (or he) paid you the subtle compliment of listening to you and taking seriously what you had to say.

The plain fact of the matter is that we *like the person who listens* to us. We cannot help warming—be it ever so slightly—toward the one who listens. “So-and-so is a good listener.” You've said this many times yourself and you meant it as a great compliment. You like to be with that person. You like to talk with him. Inevitably we warm up toward the person who listens to us seriously and takes an interest in what we have to say.

It does not matter whether we later learn that the listening was an “act,” a pretense, a snare and a delusion. It does not matter that later we discover the listener was shallow, heartless, and designing. At the time we inevitably warmed toward the person who listened to us.

### LET HIM CHANGE HIS OWN MIND

There is strong opposition against you, then, in a group meeting, and your opponent starts to speak. You know fairly well

what he is going to say, for you have been over most of his arguments with him before and you feel pretty sure he's not going to bring up anything new and startling. But this time, instead of closing your ears and politely waiting for him to finish his remarks so that you can begin yours, this time you actually listen, and you show him that you are listening. One of three things may happen.

First, he may be so surprised to find you listening that he begins to think of *that* rather than of what he wanted to say. This will tend to weaken his presentation considerably, for if he is thinking about you rather than his own arguments his ideas will wander. But you are not interested in tricking him or betraying him, so let's forget that angle.

Second, to an interested audience he may easily say far more than he intended. He may so extend his case as to run into absurdities. You have then the opportunity to attack his position from its weak points rather than its strong. But again, you don't wish to trick him or betray him, so let's forget this advantage too, although I have seen the technique used time and time again.

Third, and most important, your opponent will be less and less emotional about what he is saying, and being less emotional and finding less opposition than he expected he will begin to doubt somewhat the strength of his own arguments. He may even include in his remarks several good reasons why his ideas should not be accepted. The point is, you have not tricked him but simply allowed him to build his own "escape door" in case he has to change his mind. Let him prepare his own "escape." Let him crawl back off that limb before you saw it off. If he has been on a high horse, let him climb down himself, grace-

fully, without being shoved or pulled. Let him save his own self-respect by being "broad-minded."

#### AGREEMENT RATHER THAN DEFEAT

Most people like to think of themselves as "broad-minded." Most people pride themselves on examining into all sides of the question. Therefore, to a sympathetic and listening audience, your opponent is far more likely to argue himself into taking the other side—your side—than he is to be persuaded by you. Being broad-minded, he will almost always agree that there are good arguments on the other side. In fact, he may think of some that had not occurred to you.

#### *AT THE START*



#### *AT THE END OF GOOD LISTENING*



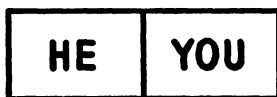
FIG. III

Have you ever had that happen to you? Have you ever found yourself, suddenly, arguing the reasons why the other fellow was right? Sometimes you wondered as you talked further just where you were going to come out after all. If you will just let the other fellow talk, and make it plain that you don't think he's a fool or an imbecile, *he will talk himself much closer to your position than you could push him with your arguments.* (See Figs. III and IV.)

Then . . . if you can yield an inch or two on your side, you will find you aren't too far from reaching some agreement. When you reach agreement, it is agreement and not defeat.

All along we have been assuming that your opponent was in the wrong. It is not too much to suppose that there are many points on which he is right. In your agreement you certainly

***IF YOU YIELD SOME, TOO***



***THE FINAL "MEETING OF MINDS"***

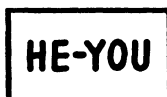


FIG. IV

don't want to miss those points. If you listen carefully to his remarks you may find yourself convinced, and willingly convinced, on many of his points. If so, do not hesitate to let him know. After all, you, too, want to be broad-minded and fair.

Unless the subject has an intensely emotional connotation to both sides, you can reach agreement better by *listening*, you can reach agreement faster by *listening*, than you can by any other way. Of course you may beat an opponent into submission by outtalking him, by outvoting him, by outshouting him, by pounding the table; in short, by imposing your will. If what you want is submission, use a club or a whip or a gun or an atomic bomb. If you want submission, then discussion is a waste of time. But submission is not agreement. If you want sensible

and rational agreement, then *listen*. Remember: you can often “listen” the other fellow and yourself into agreement.

### GOOD LISTENING IS ACTIVE

Good listening, then, is the number one rule of human relations and of conference discussion, but good listening is not easy. We think we listen, but when we test ourselves, as I indicated earlier, we discover that we really haven’t listened. How to become a good listener? (Notice that word *become*. Notice that I did not say *be*.) Becoming a good listener is a matter of conscious practice. Nobody ever said to himself “Lo, now I shall be a good listener,” and succeeded the first time he tried.

The old English poet Heywood stated the case in a little rhyme:

Who is so deaf or so blind as is he  
That wilfully will neither hear nor see?

The first requirement, then, is *will*. We must want to listen. Of course we do sometimes hear things we don’t mean to or want to, but in the group situation we can keep from hearing if we refuse to listen. It is a matter of will—meaning both wishing to do something and trying to do it.

The act of listening is not passive but active. It takes energy to listen, for you have to go halfway, figuratively speaking, to meet the speaker’s thought. Your reason for wanting to listen is that you wish to understand, and by that word *understand*, I include not only the words of the speaker but also his motive and his drive behind his words.

I have often wished that some simple psychological weighing machine could be devised which could accurately weigh “weighty” ideas. I have often thought that the figure of speech

“weighing words,” meaning considering them seriously, had a far deeper significance than appeared on the surface. When I have been actively listening in a group discussion I know that I have been putting out energy—at least as much, I often suspect, as the energy expended by those talking. Good listening is hard work—and only by hard work do we get anything out of discussion.

### HOW TO LISTEN

How do we listen? Well, it is possible to listen with your eyes closed—but you are likely to go to sleep. It is possible to lean back in your chair and put your feet up—but that way you are more likely to be passive than active. It is possible to listen standing on your head or prone on your tummy or flying through the air with the greatest of ease. Not to labor the point too much, it is possible to listen in almost any physical attitude or position that the human body can assume, but it is easier to listen when we assume a listening attitude.

How do you express physically your attitude of acceptance? By wide-open arms. How do you express physically an attitude of defiance? By legs wide apart and braced. How do you express physically an attitude of joy or pleasure? By smiling. How do you express physically an attitude of *negation*? By shaking the head.

Perhaps you have wondered, as I have, why the most usual attitude or position for praying is kneeling. It is true that you can pray standing up (the Quakers do), or with bowed head (the Presbyterians do), but the most usual and widely accepted physical position for prayer is kneeling. Thus we kneel down when we are putting ourselves in the physical attitude of praying. The right mental and spiritual attitudes are likely to follow.

Now, in a conference discussion the group members are



usually seated, often around a table. The physical attitude of listening is a slight leaning toward the speaker. You don't have to be tense about it and you don't have to exaggerate by cupping your hand around your ear. Furthermore, you watch the speaker, for he will often convey as much meaning by a shrug of the shoulder or a wave of the hands as by his words. If you are slumped back in your chair with your gaze on the ceiling, you may lose the whole significance of his remarks although you have heard every word he has uttered.

That slight (and very slight) leaning toward the speaker as he talks is our physical expression of the mental attitude of listening. Elbows on the table or not, it does not matter. But the slight leaning forward does matter. We are, so to speak, going part way toward meeting the speaker.

Now, I know what you are going to say. You think this is rubbish. Why, you know people who . . . and you yourself can listen best with your hands locked behind your head, your feet up, and your eyes fixed on the ceiling. Only thus do you shut out distracting sights and thus concentrate on the speaker's words.

I will agree that you may be right. Will you do the same for me and my crazy notion? Will you go one step further and try out this idea? Will you try it for two or three times running—that is, give it a real tryout before you decide? You don't have to be tense about it but you must be serious. If you want to listen, and if you try hard to listen and to understand, you will find that you can. And as you practice this, it comes easier and easier.

#### WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listening is helped by listening for something. In listening to music a composer may be listening for the theme and its de-

velopment, whereas the music critic may be listening for the technical performance of the player. The garage mechanic when he listens to the sound of your motor is listening *for* something—and a particular rhythm, or lack of it, may tell him what to do. Thus, in a conference the ability to listen is helped not only by willingness to listen but also by knowing what to listen *for*.

What one listens for in a conference is not *how* something is said and not *who* says it but solely *what* is being said. The theme and the evidence to support a given point are the important things to listen for. It is a psychological truth that one can pay attention to only one thing at a time. Therefore, when you are listening to *what* is being said, the physical characteristics of the speaker tend to go unnoticed.

In practicing your listening, you will find that your attention wanders. Don't be discouraged by this, for just as we can attend to only one thing at a time, so also our span of attention is relatively short. Invariably we find our attention wandering off to another subject and we bring it back, wandering off and coming back. When you discover that this happens to you, don't think you are peculiar. It is true for everybody. But you will find that your physical attitude of active listening will help bring your attention back more quickly than otherwise. Just keep practicing.

As you find yourself becoming—becoming—a good listener, you will discover that more and more people like you and appreciate your good qualities. The more they like you the more you will like them. "Good listening makes good neighbors"; good neighbors make good living.

## CHAPTER 4

### AVOID MEANINGLESS CHATTER

#### SINCERITY COUNTS

You have been training yourself to listen as the first rule of group membership, of neighborliness, of good human relations. Now what about your ability to talk, to present your ideas clearly and forcefully? It may surprise you considerably to learn that I think it does not matter much how well you present your ideas provided you are sincere and try to say something that has meaning. To illustrate my point I will describe a forum leader whom I have known for a number of years. Following his lecture he does not use the question period as an excuse for delivering another series of brief lectures prompted by the questions, as do many suave and slick lecturers. This friend of mine tries instead to think what the question means and to answer it as honestly as he can. I have heard him say such things as this: "That's a brand-new idea to me. Let's just see what it might mean." Or, again, "I just don't know how to answer your question. I've thought of that many times and I'm still groping. However, right now it looks to me as if . . ." And the audience, far from despising the man for admitting his ignorance, sits enthralled while he hesitates, backtracks, hems and haws, and finally gets going on his answer.

While a forum discussion is a different dish of tea from the conference discussion that we are considering, the point applies equally to our small group techniques. The point is that this man tries to make his talk meaningful to those who are listening. Sincerity and honest thinking count for more than smooth talk and slick technique.

### THE STRAW FIRE

As I mentioned earlier, some conference discussions are keyed to the tone of a cocktail party or a social reception, where it doesn't matter what you say so long as you keep your tongue wagging.

Some people's minds can be likened to a straw fire. Straw, as you know, is easily kindled and can be set afire by a spark. The flame leaps quickly from wisp to wisp and soon the whole straw pile is blazing with a great deal of heat. Just so some people's thoughts leap from point to point in a conversation so rapidly as to be confusing to slower-minded folk. These straw-minded people follow the free association of ideas, and the stimulus of one word or thought causes them to leap to something linked in their minds, and that in turn brings another idea. They may mention a dozen seemingly unrelated topics in as many seconds. Listen:

"You should read *Superman*," Aunt Palm suggested, cracking walnuts of which she was perversely making a belated meal. "It's all so easy. Put your heels together and zoom off. They say the Atlanteans could do it. *Vril*, they called it. Presumably it's the power that built the pyramids, too. Knowledge of the atom. Wendy could do it, too. How well I remember Maude Adams in *Peter Pan*. No one like her. I wonder why she dropped out of the theatre."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From *The Left Hand is the Dreamer*, by Nancy Wilson Ross, published by William Sloane Associates, New York. Page 43.

Consider for a moment the number of ideas in that short paragraph: *Superman*, the lost continent of Atlantis, the pyramids of Egypt, atomic power, *Peter Pan*, the beloved actress Maude Adams and her retirement from the stage. Any one of these points could have made an interesting topic of conversation, and here they are all rolled up in a ball and delivered almost in one breath. Perhaps the illustration is unfair, for according to the story Aunt Palm was deliberately trying to lead her son away from the discussion of serious matters or from taking himself too seriously. You will find in almost any novel illustrations of those who speak from the tongue. In radio serials, too, the chatterbox abounds, with the character usually treated as a comedy relief.

Following the free association of ideas is a pleasant occupation, is a pleasant way to waste a good deal of time. Only that and nothing more. Most people call it daydreaming. Agreeable though daydreaming is, we all recognize the fact that it is unproductive. Following the free play of ideas in an individual, then, we call daydreaming. It is also a form of daydreaming in a conference discussion. The chatter-chatter-chatter of a social reception is the accepted pattern of talk at a cocktail party, but in a conference discussion such a pattern leads the group as far from the main topic as the individual's daydreaming leads him away from reality.

### THE COAL FIRE

The straw fire blazes brightly but soon burns itself out, and there is nothing left but a pile of gray ashes. Other people's minds can be likened to a coal fire, difficult to kindle but when once aglow burning with a steady warming radiance. These minds are less likely to chatter, for when they do express themselves you instinctively feel it is the deep-down person inside the

outer shell who is talking to you. That person, you feel, is giving you a part of his real self. He talks from the heart while the chatterbox talks from the tongue.

The implication of all this is, of course, that the yatata-yatata of ordinary conversation of many people leads one away from thinking and into exercise of the vocal muscles for its own sake. Any noise to fill a lull or a void in the conversation. That awful void! That embarrassing silence! How hostesses seek to fill it immediately! "Fanny," my uncle once asked his wife, "is your tongue pivoted in the middle?" But Fanny rattled on, paying no attention.

#### THE FOX AND THE CROW

Perhaps you recall the fable of the fox and the crow. The crow had snatched a tidbit of food from under the fox's nose and flown off to a tree to devour it. The fox taunted the crow and flattered her until at last she was tempted to reply. As she opened her mouth to sing, the morsel of food fell out and the fox gobbled it up.

The cynical person might say that the moral of the story is to dispose quickly of something you have stolen lest you be forced to return it, or the fox was clever enough to get a bit of his own back. But I have another purpose in reminding you of the story. What I want to point out is that the crow had lost sight of the main idea and had been distracted into something to her own disadvantage by the clever, fast-talking fox.

Think for a minute and see if you can't recall a conference meeting in which just that thing has happened. A clever person, who knows very well what the other person means, can tie the speaker into knots by attacking the expressions used, by quibbling over words, by arguing and arguing small points, with the

result that the main ideas are lost sight of. A mispronunciation of a word, a mistake in grammar, a fault in diction will set the quibbler off on his rampage. He will appeal to the others in the group for support. He won't be happy until the dictionary is brought out and the offender properly squelched.

The quibbler in a discussion is like the fox in our fable. He deliberately distracts attention from the main point. I have seen a discussion on an important policy question switched to a question of English in the twinkling of an eye, and sometimes as much as five to ten minutes spent on a completely unimportant and irrelevant question of grammar. The chairman came down with a heavy hand, but at an opportune time shortly afterward the quibbler was off again.

The quibbler is as out of place in a serious discussion as is the chatterbox. And the quibbler is harder to deal with, for he will insist that unless we properly define the terms we are using we don't know what is being talked about. To some extent he may be right, but we should remind ourselves that the important ideas in the discussion of, say, a company policy should not be buried under an avalanche of minute definition.

### HOW TO AVOID QUIBBLING

One way to avoid quibbling over words is to train yourself never to correct another person's speech. If he mispronounces a word, let him. The mispronunciation may strike a jarring note in your mind, but try hard to get back to the meat of what he is saying rather than the way he says it. If his mistake in grammar is really such that you do not understand his meaning, you have the right to ask, of course. When you do ask, phrase your question in such a way as to get at his meaning and avoid the gram-

mathematical statement. But such cases are rare, and so I caution you to use this technique sparingly.

Suppose, however, the quibbler attacks you. Suppose you have made a grammatical blunder and he cuts in. Don't let him throw you off the main track. Thank him politely for his correction and keep right on with the main course of your thoughts. Don't be afraid to make a mistake. Don't be afraid to try out a new word that you have just heard. Many individuals have been made so self-conscious of their speech by strict English teachers that they are almost afraid to talk at all. Whenever they make a mistake they become tongue-tied, and so the quibbler has a field day.

#### THE WILL TO MISUNDERSTAND

The quibbler is motivated by what the psychiatrist Dr. A. A. Lowe calls "the will to misunderstand." Not only does he catch you up on matters of grammar and diction, not only does he spout forth on definitions, he also attacks on the basis of literalness. He insists on taking literally every remark you make. For example, the quibbler would not for a moment let me get away with telling the fable of the fox and the crow, because he would insist, first, that animals cannot talk and, second, that crows and foxes do not eat the same food and hence the original premise was absurd. And so on and so on. A metaphorical expression (and much of our ordinary speech is metaphor) is the quibbler's meat. He will tear a metaphor apart happily and worry the shreds for all the world like a puppy with his master's carpet slipper. The quibbler is literal minded.

No matter how tempting the opportunity to tangle with the quibbler in a conference session, avoid it. Don't be like the silly crow and lose what you've got in a debate about inconse-



quential. If he interrupts you, smile and thank him and keep right on with your main idea. This does not mean that you should ignore a legitimate interruption, for at this point it is only the quibbler we are concerned with. Remember: if you will yourself avoid quibbling over words and will ignore other quibblers in the group you will soon be getting down to fundamentals in your discussion, and you can keep to fundamentals if you will concentrate on saying only those things which have meaning for you.

### "THIS IS OFF THE RECORD"

Where many discussion sessions fall down is in failure to bring out what the members really think. Many times have I walked away from a meeting only to have a member of the group come up to me and say, "I didn't want to say this in the meeting. But I think we have overlooked an important point." Why didn't he want to say it in the discussion? Was he afraid or ashamed? Not at all. The tone of the meeting was not such as to enable him to unburden himself. The tone had been intellectual, with those present speaking "off the tops of their heads." He knew that nobody else was "speaking off the record," and he'd be darned if he would be the one to start.

The phrase "speaking off the record" has attained wide usage and the meaning now seems to be: "Please don't quote me—and if you do I'll deny it—but this is what I really think . . ." In other words, when I speak "off the record" I am giving you my real, innermost thoughts on the subject at hand.

What is more important than getting out what everybody in the group really thinks? How else are you going to solve a problem that vitally concerns those present?

Sometimes the phrase "off the record" is also used to mean

"I am speaking of confidential matters." But in my experience this meaning is more rare than the first. A person should speak but rarely to a group "in strictest confidence," but rather keep his secrets to himself. A secret once told—even to your dearest friend—is no longer a secret.

But let's neglect the "secret" meaning of "off the record" and mention one or two other expressions indicative of inner thoughts. A typical phrase is "Just among us here." Another, "Speaking within this room." Another, "I wouldn't wish to be quoted, but . . ." These expressions are in a way signals that the person speaking is giving you his real ideas on the subject. And it is a curious thing to note that we do use these signals almost as if to say that our previous remarks on the subject could be disregarded.

We might ask ourselves just why we feel we have to use such signals. But before you attempt to answer that one, let me ask you another question. You have heard the expression "You always know where So-and-so stands." And the expression is one of great approbation. Now, why do you admire such a person? It is because old So-and-so will usually tell you what he thinks frankly, honestly, forthrightly, with no beating about the bush. Old So-and-so doesn't care whether his remarks are repeated or not, nor does he have to qualify his comments by speaking confidentially or "within this room." He is willing to back up his statements at any time before any audience however critical or hostile.

### WARMING UP

The rest of us, no matter how hard we try, are not so forthright as old So-and-so, and so in a conference discussion we often talk without expecting to have our thoughts taken too seriously.

Sometimes we aren't even much interested in the subject. It has no bearing on our daily life. Thus, until we get warmed up to it, until it touches a really vital spot in our thinking, we are apt to talk casually about the matter, off the tops of our heads. Once we are "warmed up" to a subject, and once we are vitally concerned, we begin talking from our hearts, as it were, and we serve notice on the rest of the group that from now on we mean every word we say.

Any group needs a "warming-up period," no matter how interested or what the topic. Group members can greatly assist this warming up if they will assume that they are dealing with honorable men and women and will concentrate upon saying what has real meaning for each. You need not be afraid of boring the other members if what you say has meaning, real meaning for you. You will make the interesting discovery that is also has real meaning for the others. The shy person will recover from embarrassment when he learns that the idea that seems really worth while to him will also seem worth while to at least some of the rest.

Remember: Save your chatter for the cocktail party and save your quibble-teasing for the person who likes you in spite of it. In a group conference say only those things which have meaning for you.

## CHAPTER 5

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### BE YOURSELF

#### “TO THINE OWN SELF BE TRUE”

If you have started to practice the two rules just given you—and I hope you have already begun—you will see that the two rules about listening and about talking meaningful talk lead directly to a third rule. This rule is so simple to state and so hard to follow that I hesitate to put it down. If it weren't for the fact that experience has shown it to be probably the most important rule of the three, I would be inclined to skip it, for I know you are going to react violently when you read it. The rule is: *Be Yourself*.

This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

Perhaps you feel the same way about the quotation above as did one of my English professors who insisted that Polonius' speech to young Laertes on his departure from home was a satiric portrait of an old bore loading his impetuous son with good advice to which no young man of spirit would pay the slightest attention. Be that as it may, you have, by starting to read this book, asked me what I think. I can only tell you what

has meaning for me; namely, it is hard to be oneself, and yet that is the one rule of conduct to which most persons would like to conform—if they could but do it.

Each of us has a concept, however vague, of our *Self*, and it's as important to us as life. Some people may not care a hoot about the rules of conduct their mothers and fathers laid down for them, and some may even feel that they have outgrown the beliefs and doctrines of the religion they were brought up in, but there is within each of us that little something, that I-my-me something, that we do care about. *That* something must be right or everything else is wrong. Even the most hardened murderer may go to the chair taking pride within himself that he's no "squealer." For the rest of us that wouldn't be enough, but for him it is at least one small point to which he can cling.

### WHO AM I?

What is this *Self* to which we cling so tenaciously? Have you ever asked yourself "Who am I?" If so, you have usually come to the conclusion that you are *somebody*. Now, just examine that idea for a moment. Pronounce it *some-body*. It begins to be clear that whatever else I may be, I am a physical body with all the recognizable needs and hungers plus a something else that makes the body tick. Never mind trying to name that something else, for it makes no difference whether it is called *soul*, *spirit*, *vital force*, *mind*, or what not.

It is that something else that tends to make me say of myself: "I'm *somebody*!" Meaning not *anybody*, meaning also not *nobody*. In other words, this particular combination of body and something else seems to be unique in many ways. First, *nobody* else looks exactly like me. Others have, like me, two eyes and a nose and a mouth and two ears, and yet *nobody* else looks ex-

actly like me. My physical body, then, seems to be different from everybody else. And by inference, too, that additional something else that makes my body tick is probably as different from that of everybody else as my body is. Furthermore, my name is (usually) just a little different from that of any other person. There is a quality of uniqueness which each of us recognizes and acts on. "Me, I'm different!" How many times have you said that about yourself? You've also said, "That may be all right for you, but it's what happens to *me* that counts."

That I-myself-me, that unique little bit of humanity going about on this globe, seems constantly to be seeking some form of expression. We are constantly seeking forms of self-expression, which may mean that we are trying to comprehend and make some understandable reality out of existence. Understandable, that is, to *me*.

You may be wondering just what all this has to do with conference discussion. Just this. Any group of human beings is a group of little *mes*. And each *me* has the same feeling of individuality and of uniqueness as you yourself have. A group of people, then, is fundamentally a group of I-my-mes seeking some form of I-my-me expression and understanding. This does not mean that everyone is completely self-centered and selfish, but it does imply that almost any group begins as a coming together of individuals. How to get a feeling of us out of a group of *mes* is essentially the problem of conference discussion.

### WHICH IS THE "REAL" SELF?

The expression "I'm not feeling myself today" is one that you've used many times. "What's the matter with Harry? He doesn't seem himself somehow." You know what you mean, and your listener knows what you mean. Harry under these cir-

cumstances would ordinarily behave as we expect him to, but today he behaves differently. He is cross when usually he is pleasant. It is unusual for him to be so lethargic or listless. This is a Harry we have not seen before and, although we recognize our Harry by his facial and bodily characteristics, we do not recognize Harry by his behavior.

Under certain stresses, then, Harry will behave unexpectedly. But how could Harry be anybody but himself unless he is pretending? Or has he been pretending before and now is showing his "true" self? He does not mean to be cross, but suddenly he finds angry words pouring out. He does not mean to deceive, but the true explanations are so long and involved and unbelievable that a lie seems simpler. He does not mean to forgive, but he is surprised to find himself acting in a warm and generous way toward someone he dislikes. Which is the "true" Harry?

The truth of the matter is that Harry is many selves and not just one. As we shall see in the chapter on role playing, each of us is called upon to act in many different ways by the circumstances around us.

### BLUFFING AND PRETENDING

In many a poker game, a good bluff will win over a better hand. One of life's little triumphs which most men seem to enjoy is winning a poker pot not with a sure-fire straight flush but with a lowly pair. The keen player will vary his style of play, playing his cards "close" at times and "high, wide, and handsome" at other times, sometimes betting only on a sure thing, other times bluffing. A keen player will sometimes let himself be caught bluffing and at other times will show his sure-fire hand. In the end, the ordinary player doesn't know where the expert stands and can't tell whether he is bluffing or not. It is fun to let

the others in the game think we have either more or less than the hand is worth. Bluffing isn't cheating and bluffing is definitely a part of the game of poker.

### POKER IN BUSINESS

In many a business deal it is also considered wise to let your opponent think you have either more or less than you actually possess. An air of confidence and self-assurance often conceals a meager store of resources, and contrary-wise a modest and diffident manner sometimes covers the sure-fire hand. The object in the case of such business deals, as in poker deals, is to trick your opponent into doing what you wish him to do. Just as in poker, such trickery in business deals is usually not thought of as downright dishonesty. It is considered "smart business." The same holds true in other situations in life. The attorneys trying a case will not always reveal until the proper moment the full extent of the evidence available. The wise physician cures many a fancied ill with sugar pills which he knows will do the patient no good beyond making him think he will recover. The parent and the teacher cannot always tell children the plain, unvarnished truth but often must confine their remarks to saying only as much as can be understood at the moment.

### POKER IN GROUP DISCUSSION

Is group discussion, then, like other life situations? Do we say only what will "get us by"? Do we let others think we know more or know less than we really do? Are the rules of the game in discussion about the same as the rules of the game in poker?

The answers to these questions are not easy. To understand the answers we must go further into the purpose of the meeting, and the purpose of the presence of the individuals in the



group. If the purpose of the meeting is to solve a problem which is felt to be a genuine problem by most of the members, then there is no good excuse for bluffing or pretense. If trickery (not necessarily dishonesty) will solve the problem, there is probably no valid reason for the conference in the first place. The chicanery might just as well be put into effect without the bother of getting the group together. If the problem is real, the rules of the game in conference discussion demand that all the cards be on the table.

### THE POOR LOSER

Americans admire good sportsmanship. The loser in a poker game is supposed to smile as he watches the winner pocket his pile of cash. The defeated candidate in an election is supposed to send a telegram of congratulations to the victor. The runner-up in a tennis match leaps over the net and shakes hands with the man who defeated him. In our democratic society, the minority in a political contest are supposed to submit gracefully to the will of the majority. The poor loser, the man who sulks in defeat, the fan who yells "We was robbed" is not the sportsman that Americans admire.

In a conference discussion where the true intent is to solve a problem, who is the loser but the whole group if the problem still remains? The discussion situation, then, is not a contest but a seeking of a solution, a way out of some present difficulty.

### THE SURE LOSER

Most of us like to pretend that we know more than we really do. When some book is mentioned which we feel we should have read we nod and smile as though we had read it. We like to be thought "in the know." We hate to have mention made

of a "famous" person whom we have never heard about. We like to think our particular bits of information are important. If, even momentarily, the other person's information or names or references are new to us, we like to let him think we knew that all along.

Somehow that little something within us that we call our Self just can't bear to have the other fellow get ahead. It is as though if we admitted ignorance we would be betraying that Self. Possibly this may be so in business, in competitive sport, in a contest of wills. But a group conference is none of those things. A conference discussion is simply a device for solving a common problem through co-operative thinking. If we pretend to know more than we do, *it is we ourselves who are the loser*, for we have lost at least what the other person might have told us.

No, bluffing and pretending have no place in group discussion. Such attitudes are fatal toward the development of deep-down, "off-the-record" thinking and talking. If you feel ashamed that you are more ignorant than the others, take heart in the old saying that the admission of ignorance is the beginning of wisdom.

You need never be ashamed of not having read a certain book or met certain experiences, or of not knowing everything another person knows. And you need never be ashamed to admit the fact. Not only does it give the other person a chance to tell you (which he loves) and you a chance to listen (which he loves, too) but it also gives you *a chance to find out something new which you might never have discovered without asking*. It isn't enough just not to be caught pretending; try not to pretend at all. When you can do that you are well on the way toward success in dealing with people in groups.

## HOW NOT TO PRETEND

Now you are going to try not to pretend. You will find the going rough, and you will many times wish in your heart that you had not admitted ignorance. But be of good courage, for eventually it will be easier. When someone mentions a book you haven't read or a radio program that you missed, then say "Tell me about it." When others keep talking of certain persons and their opinions as though they were important, say "Who are they?" or "I don't know whom you mean."

I know of several people who bolster their egos by saying "I never heard of them," as though that dismissed the subject. It might be an appropriate gesture of dismissal if you were the big and final authority on a given subject and therefore, since you had never heard of such-and-such, it couldn't exist or be important. No, you are not Mr. Big—and neither are those other persons who use that expression, no matter how big and important they want you to think them. The real, honest-to-goodness Mr. Big got that way from listening to people tell him things he didn't know—and by acting on his new information.

Try out this suggestion for a few days. You can use your own words for my phrases "Tell me about it" and "I don't know what you mean." The important thing is not the words you use but the attitude you assume. As I said above, you will meet with discouragement and you will occasionally be laughed at, but in the end you will wind up by liking yourself better and you will discover that others are liking you better, too. Do people always "know where you stand"? Maybe you haven't yet learned enough, maybe you haven't lived long enough, to know just where you stand on all questions. But if you stand always for

honest inquiry you will win the respect and admiration of those around you.

Then that *Self* you are so conscious of will be at least a little bit better self than it used to be. And that's what each of us wants.

### KNOW YOUR LIMITATIONS

That rule "Be Yourself" will help you in other ways than just group conference. The most unhappy persons I know are those who are constantly striving to be something or somebody else. They are unhappy and frustrated individuals who have, seemingly, set themselves a false goal of ideal. Many of the patients in a psychiatrist's office are there because they feel failure. Some of the patients have achieved what the world would call success and yet they feel a failure. And the strange part is that they cannot define the reasons why.

I am not a psychiatrist and I cannot and would not attempt to prescribe for such persons. But I do know this—few people are willing to admit their limitations. Few people are willing to admit that they can't do what others in the crowd can do or that they don't know what others seem to know. Many drownings occur every summer because of this and many painful cases of sunburn, heat exhaustion, hernia, and cracked vertebrae. If the beginning of wisdom is first admitting that you don't know, the beginning of efficient use of your physical strength is in knowing what you can and can't do.

You have heard the story of the man who was asked whether he could play the violin. He replied that he didn't know because he had never tried. That story sounds silly because we know that to play a violin requires hours and hours of practice

before one can even get a recognizable note. It looks simple until one tries it. So do the activities of the big businessman—at least in the movies. He seems to be able to make decisions quickly and forcefully, with little effort.

If you will start admitting to yourself that you don't know, your mind will almost immediately react with something that you do know that may be closely allied to the subject in hand. There are many things that you do know, and it is only with these that you can commence to build your world, adding to it bit by bit as new knowledge and new relationships come into your experience.

#### WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE ANGRY

Many of my students ask me, "Does the rule *Be Yourself* mean that if you feel angry and nasty toward a person you should act that way?" Psychologists tell us that the way to rid oneself of an intense emotional feeling is by muscular action. You feel angry toward Harry and you want to hit him. If you do hit him you will probably release your own physical body of the emotion. But if Harry hits you back, you are angry all over again. So that method does not release you but simply intensifies your problem.

If you are very angry you will probably want to throw something. This, we are told, is excellent release for the mounting tension inside. Indeed, there is a firm of manufacturers who used to advertise a cheap form of breakable knickknack which was recommended to feuding husbands and wives for throwing against the wall when anger or annoyance reached the throwing point. Not so whacky as it sounds, for most married couples would far rather smash some china than smash their marriage.

But hitting people and throwing things are out as far as group

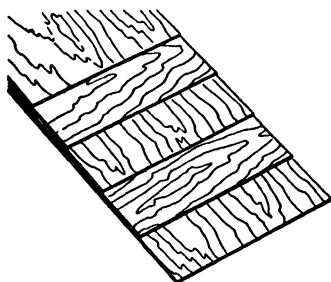
conference goes. Even shouting and pounding the table, while they are some slight relief for tension, will not accomplish anything. What can you do? Well, first of all admit that you are angry. This in itself takes a little of the steam off. As a second suggestion, you can get up from the conference table and go get a drink of water or throw open a window and take a deep breath of fresh air—all the while admitting to yourself that you are angry and remembering that as long as you are angry your opponent has the advantage. Go down to the washroom and pound the wall if you must, or wad up a paper towel and hurl it into the wastebasket as hard as you please. (You may hurt your arm by throwing it too hard.) With some of the emotional steam let off by physical action, you will be better able when you return to the conference table to cope with the situation that irritated you. Perhaps you have noticed that a skillful chairman will sometimes suggest a “breather” when members are growing too heated and tempers are beginning to fray.

Remember: it is agreement concerning the solving of a problem that all of you are interested in. Don't be a “fall guy” for cheap taunts and petty insults. When I was a youth, a dignified old friend of the family once said to me, “No one can insult me but my betters.” I have often pondered this and wondered if he could have meant that when we allow ourselves to be insulted we are lowering ourselves beneath the plane of him who offered the taunt.

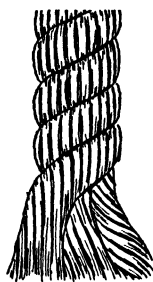
On the same occasion this friend also said, “Instead of insisting that you're as good as the other person, how about admitting right off that he's as good as you are!” Such an admission on the part of all the little mes in a group conference will do much toward making a co-operative us. You lose no part of your identity—none of that precious *Self* which each of us holds so

dear—when you are part of a working team. In fact each *me* is strengthened by the added strength of all.

No matter how weak each *me* is, a closely knit and co-operative *us* may be strong. (See Fig. V.)



**LAMINATED WOOD -  
SEVERAL THIN LAYERS  
CLOSELY BONDED  
TOGETHER**



**MANILA ROPE -  
HUNDREDS OF SMALL  
FIBRES TWISTED  
TOGETHER**

FIG. V

In an old Scandinavian folk tale a farmer called together his three sons, for they had been quarreling. He handed the eldest son a bundle of twigs tied tightly together and asked him to break the bundle. The lad was strong, but though he heaved with his great shoulders and tugged with all his might, the bundle was unbroken. The second son failed too, and the third. Then the farmer took the bundle and cut the cords that bound it. Drawing out each twig separately, he easily broke them all.

## PART II

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# How People Behave in a Group





## CHAPTER 6

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### YOUR EFFECT ON THE GROUP

#### TALK HELPS YOU TO LIVE

You remember that we started this book by saying that people are always talking. With all this talk going on, there is a great deal of real communication, but there is also much uncommunication or lack of real understanding of one *Self* for another. Some talk is simply exercise, exercise of the vocal muscles, about all the exercise some people seem to get. Much of the time, too, talk is what might be called self-expression. The other persons constitute targets at which the individual is hurling not only his words but also himself in order to make an impression of some sort. Thus, part of this talk is necessary communication and part of it necessary self-expression. *All of it helps the individual to keep himself alive.* This is so because it helps him maintain an awareness of *Self*.

Robinson Crusoe was a well-adjusted and well-integrated personality, but for all his self-sufficiency he was a lonely person on his island. His joy at discovering another person in his little world, his Man Friday, was unbounded. What Man Friday did for Crusoe was to keep him alive, for if left completely and utterly alone one's little *Self* would die.

Does this seem strange to you? Consider an infant. Left alone,

an infant, as you know, would die, for he is nourished and supported by other people until the time comes when he can strike out for himself. The baby, the child, the adolescent, and even the young adult is nurtured in physical growth and development in the presence of other people. Thus, the awareness of Self and the growth and development of that awareness are wholly bound up with a consciousness of the presence of other people. It is almost impossible to think of yourself except against the background of other people.

### ONE'S OWN PEOPLE

And it isn't just any other people, it must be one's own people. In other words, the normal pattern of growth and development from birth to death seems to be a process of the finding of one's own Self among one's own people. Some psychologists maintain that this perception of the difference between one's own people and other people develops in a baby as early as six to eight months. If you have had experience with babies you know that at about that time a baby will suddenly cry when transferred from the arms of its mother to Uncle Jim. Mother is mortified. "I just don't know what's got into Susie. She always used to go to Uncle Jim." Well, if uncle will stay around the baby long enough and be there often enough, baby will come to recognize him as part of her people, but if he just comes to visit once a month, little Susie will be a long time accepting him as belonging to her.

In that little word *belonging*, we have the key. The expression is common, and the experience is common to all men. The child soon learns where he "belongs" and soon learns who "belongs" to him. In speaking to children adults are constantly using the phrase and are constantly expressing the idea of "be-

longing." We say such things as "Whose little girl are you?" And we are delighted when she replies that she is "daddy's little girl" or "mommy's girl." The idea that adults belong to children is in their minds all the time, although we seem to be surprised when children ask us "Whose daddy are you?"

The child, then, soon learns where he "belongs" and quickly learns to seek those persons to whom he belongs and who belong to him and to shun other people. As the child grows he begins to widen the circle. He increases his horizon of physical surroundings and of people wherein he "belongs." When we say "I don't feel comfortable, I don't feel myself, when I'm where I don't belong" everybody knows exactly what we mean and everybody agrees.

### WHERE DO YOU "BELONG"?

You are beginning to see the bearing of this fundamental point in group activity. In any social gathering of people from different walks of life, from different parts of the country, different social strata, different activities and interests—in such a gathering likes gravitate to likes. People tend to group themselves according to where they "belong." Among a gathering of strangers you have found yourself invariably looking for someone you know and immediately going to them. Or, failing to find someone you know, you have joined the group that seemed to be "your kind."

The next time you find yourself in such a situation you need not be embarrassed or distressed. Just remember that everybody else feels much the same way. It is human nature—or it is at least the way everybody has been brought up. Perhaps you have envied the person who seems to "belong" easily, but as you increase your knowledge and understanding of people you will find

that meeting strangers and feeling "at home" among different groups comes easier to you. The more emotionally and intellectually mature a person is the more sure of himself ~~he seems~~ to be. This is another way of saying that he does and can "belong" in many different situations and among many different groups. Remember: the first point is not to be frightened among a group of strangers. You won't be frightened or embarrassed (or at least much less so) if you remember that everybody else is at least a little unhappy and uncomfortable too. One of the best ways to put yourself at ease is to be friendly and to put someone else at ease. If you will start right off by accepting them, they will invariably tend to accept you. If you feel aloof and act as though they are not "my people," they will tend to feel the same way ~~toward you.~~

#### "BELONGING" IN A CONFERENCE

A conference discussion, whatever else it may be, is primarily a group of people. Just another group of people like yourself. Into this group each person is carrying his own Self just as you are, and his own perception or feeling of where and with what and with whom he "belongs." If each person feels that he belongs, and that all the others are a part of "his own people," then it becomes relatively easy for each to be himself. Under these circumstances the individual will have relatively little difficulty in "expressing himself," which means that he will say what he really thinks and feels. In these circumstances there will be plenty of talk, and it will become fruitful and meaningful talk if there is a serious purpose behind the meeting.

We have seen that differences of opinion sometimes grow into conflict. It is true that differences of opinion, even among members of a group who "belong," do tend to separate members

into "us" and "they." But so long as the feeling of belonging is strong enough to hold the group together as a group, and so long as there is genuine willingness to have a pooling of opinion, this tendency is not disruptive. Indeed, these differences of opinion may widen for each person the horizon of his belonging.

Where the members of the conference do not know one another, each individual tends to shrink within the protective barriers of his own Self, and where various factions begin to crop up, individuals will tend to gravitate toward the faction where they feel they belong. In such a situation there is little hope of having a meeting of minds, and little hope of a satisfactory solution to the problem to be discussed. The leader of the conference must assume the task of fostering the feeling of belongingness within the whole group. Group members who are genuinely interested in solving the problem must help him do this, for he cannot do it alone. The most skillful tricks of the experienced conference leader will appear as superficial and silly antics unless the group members assist actively in fostering the feeling of belonging to the whole group. Unless there is this feeling, there can be no meeting of minds.

### HOW YOU CAN "BELONG"

How can the group members help? First, by recognizing the necessity for doing something about the situation and, second, by making an effort to conquer their own feeling of aloofness in order to go halfway to meet other persons. The other persons in the group are just as wary and untrustful of you as you are of them, and if you are yourself less wary and more friendly and trusting of them, they also will tend to be so toward you. It is as simple as that. As simple and as difficult, for it is a difficult and courageous thing to be the first to offer friendliness among a

group of strangers or toward ~~the members of another faction.~~ Never mind. Be the first to "stick your neck out." The worst that could happen is a rebuff—which you half expect anyway and which you would get even if you didn't take the chance. There is so much to be gained that the risk is worth the gamble. Try it. You will be surprised. Most of the time you aren't rebuffed at all but are met with a warm and thankful smile.

### WE HAVE TO WIN ONCE IN A WHILE

Closely associated with the feeling of belonging is the wish to excel. One of the fundamental psychological drives in human beings is the drive to excel. The field of excelling is of far less importance than the fact of excelling. Somehow and somewhere, in order to maintain that Self we have been talking about, we have to be a little better than somebody else. Not necessarily better than everybody, but at least better than somebody. Whether it be to sew a fine seam, to hit a tennis ball, to run a railroad, to play at cards, to make an automobile, to grow lima beans—somehow and somewhere we must be able to do a little better than somebody else. It is curious but true that in order to "be oneself" one must be better than someone else's self, even if it is only a fraction better.

I have said that this drive to excel is associated with the feeling of belonging. It is obvious that if we can't ever win in this group we are in the wrong league. Thus, we tend to gravitate toward the league or group wherein we can win at least once in a while. The group in which we can "shine" at least once in a while is the place where we "belong."

It isn't necessary that we win always, for in fact if we do that the group itself will tend to exclude us. The other members also have to win at least once in a while. Thus, if we win too often,

the others will refuse to associate with us and we will have to seek a new group where someone else can win from us occasionally. This is illustrated by the fact that the Notre Dame football team has been dropped from the schedules of many colleges. While it may be true that Notre Dame has no trouble in filling its schedule, for there are always new teams to play, it is also true that one of the reasons why a new team is willing to play Notre Dame is the hope that *this* time will be the one time when the South Bend players will falter.

The team that *always* wins, or the individual, eventually finds itself with no one left to strive against—except in another league. The team that *always* loses gravitates toward the league in which it can win at least occasionally. To take an absurd situation, it would certainly be no contest if sand-lot high school boys were to pit themselves against the New York Yankees. Not only would no spectators wish to see the game, the players themselves would refuse to go through the motions.

#### THE REWARDS FOR WINNING

The rewards for excelling are many and varied, but the physical rewards seem to be of far less importance than approval or praise or recognition. Early in life you probably learned how much a pat on the back and a "Good boy!" meant and how much harder you tried after that. You learned, too, that it helps to excel if you know you are doing a good job. To have others know it and recognize it helps even more. The satisfactions of doing well are dependent not only upon your own appraisal but also upon the group's appraisal. Most of the fun comes in being able to demonstrate your prowess—not to yourself alone but to someone else. Or at least to tell him about it and have him approve. One may compete with oneself, as in bettering one's



golf score, but there is always the locker room or the nineteenth hole for you to talk about what you've done. Much stress is laid upon the tangible rewards for excellence, but too little upon the more effective rewards of approval and praise and recognition.

### HERE'S WHERE I SHINE

"Our own people," then, or the groups in which we "belong" are those groups in which we can shine at least once in a while. I have heard it said that a good host is one who allows each guest an opportunity to put his best foot forward, and a good host encourages each guest to shine at least momentarily. When we can do this we are "at home" with other people. A good host tries to make his guests feel "at home."

Of course, one may excel in groups where one does not belong, but that excelling will not readily be recognized by the group. The rewards for such excelling will be given grudgingly, if at all. Indeed, instead of rewards one may find resentment. "Who does he think he is, anyhow?" That is a typical reaction. But with your own group, the others, far from resenting your excellence, will take pride in your accomplishments. "That's our boy!" they will say.

### "THESE THINGS I HATE"

In addition to the drive to excel, another fundamental psychological need is the need to be angry—or rather the need to have a harmless means for expressing anger. As a part of your learning how to be a good group member and learning about people I suggest that you write down a list of the things that seem to anger or annoy you most. Put this heading at the top of

the page "These are the things I hate"; and then list rapidly what comes to mind. I think you will be surprised at how many items will be on your list.

If you want to make a game of it with some of your friends, provide each with his own sheet of paper and pencil. At the end of a certain time, pass the papers around. Have the sheets of paper folded over and put into a hat. Then have each one read not his list but somebody else's.

If you will try this game with several groups of friends and save all the papers, you will probably discover (if your friends were being honest) that most of the causes of anger or annoyance or irritation were personal in nature. By this I mean that people generally will accept physical or natural occurrences like the weather with a shrug of the shoulders, for there isn't much that can be done about it.

But people will not accept other people's actions. It is the things other people do or say or their appearance or even their very presence that are at the bottom of most of our irritations and annoyances. For one person it may be the stupid or inane questions people ask, for another it may be garlic on the breath, for another it may be car drivers who blow their horns needlessly, and so on and so on. However long the list, the major portion of it will be devoted to the very ordinary things that people do all the time. That is, if you search far enough you will find someone who doesn't like or will be annoyed at almost everything you can think up for a person to do or say.

Would you gather from this that most of us just don't like human beings? Far from it. In fact, just the opposite, for most of us do like human beings. We just don't like some of the things that people do or say. And what are those things for you?

Does the way Susie walks irritate you? Or the way she closes her eyes when she has something important to say and opens them at the end of a sentence? Or her habit of interrupting? I think you will probably find, if you have made your list honestly and examined it carefully, that those things about people which most irritate you are the *things that get in your way*. Not all the things that annoy you, but those which annoy you most are probably those things which keep you from doing what you want to do—the things that get in your way. In other words, the things that frustrate you.

#### WHAT FRUSTRATIONS ARE

Frustrations are easy to understand. The feeling of frustration is the feeling you get when you are prevented by something or somebody from doing something you wish to do. It does not matter what you want to do. Perhaps you want to go somewhere and find a stone wall or a wide stream blocking your path or perhaps you want to write a letter and can find no writing paper or ink. The fact that you have been prevented from doing something that you wanted to do causes a feeling of frustration.

Frustration may be simply illustrated. In Fig. VI the arrow represents directed effort toward a goal (G). So long as there is no hindrance, there is satisfaction in directing one's efforts toward an attainable and desirable goal. Even little hindrances (h, h, h) cause minor frustrations until they are surmounted. There is satisfaction in overcoming minor obstacles, so long as the goal (G) is in sight and attainable. But the realization that the barrier (B) completely stops you causes the feeling of frustration. Frustration, then, is the feeling you have when you are prevented from reaching some desirable goal you have set out to attain.

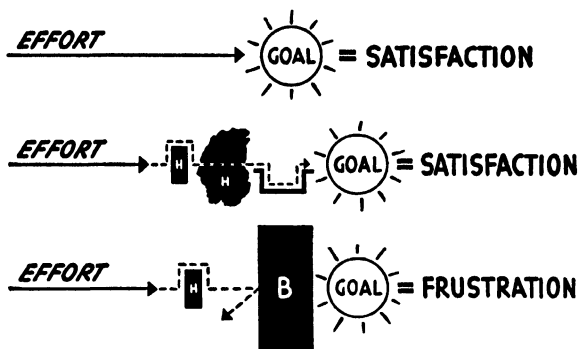


FIG. VI

If the cause of your frustration is a physical thing, you seek a way around the obstacle or barrier. If the physical thing is big or immovable or insurmountable—in other words, if there is simply nothing you can do about the situation—then you have to retire gracefully and seek another goal. Most people recognize this, although they may beat their strength against something far stronger than they.

But if the cause of the frustration is a person, something a person does or says (it may be only interrupting you when you want to talk), then your frustration may turn to anger. The strong emotion of anger needs some physical expression and usually finds such physical release in violent movements as waving one's arms or striking and hitting. The focus of such movement is frequently the person who caused the emotion.

#### FEAR AND FRUSTRATION

There is another strong emotion that seeks physical expression, and that is the emotion of fear. When we are afraid we want to run or to hit out and strike hard at the object of our fear. Thus, two strong emotions, anger and fear, may both find

physical expression in the form of hitting out or striking at the cause of the emotion.

In a group situation, when you find So-and-so waving his arms wildly, or pounding the table, or giving you a tongue-lashing, it may be because he is either angry or afraid. If he is angry, then it is probably because you or your words are keeping him from doing what he wanted to do. If he is afraid, it may be because your words seem a threat to his inner security, a threat to his idea of Self that he carries with him all the time.

Psychologists may not agree with all that I have just said, but I know from experience in dealing with people in groups that it will help you greatly in dealing with So-and-so if you can quickly analyze the cause of his emotion. From the outward manifestations you can't tell immediately whether he is angry or afraid, for both emotions may cause the same physical reactions. If he is afraid, he wants and needs reassurance. If he is angry, reassurance is the last thing he wants. What he wants is you out of his way. This means that, unless you can be pretty sure whether the emotion is anger or fear, you may greatly worsen the situation.

Go over quickly his latest remarks in reply to you. If his speech is full, more full than usual, of I-my-me, the likelihood is that the emotion is fear and his inner Self is battling for security. On the other hand, if his speech is a blast directly at you, if he is saying a great many uncomplimentary things about you, it is likely that he sees you as the barrier between him and his goal. The emotion is probably anger born of frustration.

#### HOW THE INDIVIDUAL FRUSTRATES THE GROUP

It is not only the individual who can be frustrated; the whole group may feel that way. This may happen as the result of

aimless and idle chitchat or of inconclusive discussion when there is a serious purpose acknowledged or understood by the group. You remember we learned earlier that every group member had some purpose in mind when he attended the meeting. If that purpose is not realized, or if another purpose which can be realized is not substituted, then the individuals will feel unhappy and frustrated.

A dominant person in the group can often frustrate group

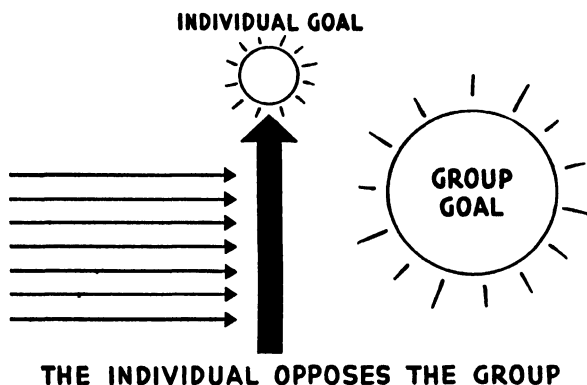
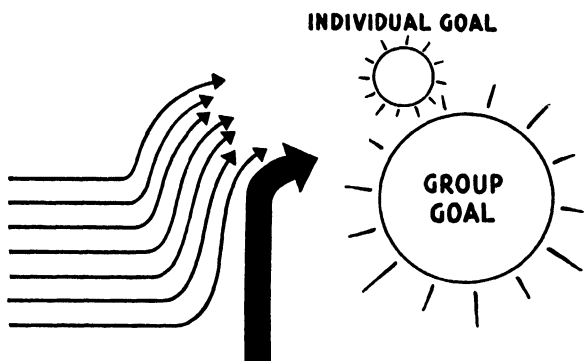


FIG. VII

purpose. He does not need to shout or make a show of force. In many instances he is quiet, quiet but persistent. In other words, he simply will not give in no matter what group pressure is brought upon him. Certain techniques of using parliamentary procedure are his favorite weapons for confusing issues, for creating doubt, for dividing the ranks of his opponents. Or he may quibble over unimportant technicalities and by insisting on having these points cleared first he may wear down the alertness of others so that later when the group is weary of arguing fruitlessly his important ideas may be accepted

with less scrutiny. When accused by others of wasting time over trivialities and of splitting hairs, he will exclaim that this point is the crux of the whole matter. He may succeed in throwing the whole problem out of perspective by magnifying the importance of one little detail. Also it is well to remember that he may have no alternatives to suggest as solutions, for his whole



**THE GROUP OUT-LISTENS THE INDIVIDUAL**

FIG. VIII

purpose may be simply to prevent any decision being agreed upon.

The situation may be graphically presented as in Figs. VII, and VIII.

#### HOW TO HANDLE THIS INDIVIDUAL

What are you going to do when you find yourself as one of a group confronted by such a situation? How are you and the others going to handle this person whom you now recognize is in your way? Your first feelings are of frustration and resentment. You want to silence him, you want to remove him. Others in the group are beginning to show their annoyance

and anger, and instead of concentrating on the problem are focusing their attention on him.

No single answer may be given to the question, for the variations on the situation are many. However, first of all, attempt to control your own reactions and remain calm and, second, by the force of your example try to persuade the others to do the same. Then you can begin the task of winning him to a unified purpose by outlistening him. Give him plenty of time to state his position fully, to state his objections in as detailed a manner as possible. Ask him questions—honest questions and not trick questions—and by asking him questions force him to state his conclusions and his solution to the problem.

You may think this is a waste of time, but to have the meeting conclude with no decision is a far greater waste. You may be impatient and long for a quicker way to shut him off. Of course, the group may decide to exclude him and may ask him to leave, but apart from this drastic procedure, there is no quicker way to melt this obstacle to group achievement than to outlisten him. (See Fig. VIII.) I have seen it happen, and unless the obstinate individual is much smarter than all the rest of you put together, you can turn the whole episode into satisfactory achievement which is all the more satisfactory because he winds up *with* you rather than against you. His parting shot may be a weak "Well, I just wanted to be sure that all sides of the questions were thoroughly explored." When you can assure him that this will be done, there is no further obstacle from this source.



## CHAPTER 7

# THE EFFECT OF THE GROUP ON YOU

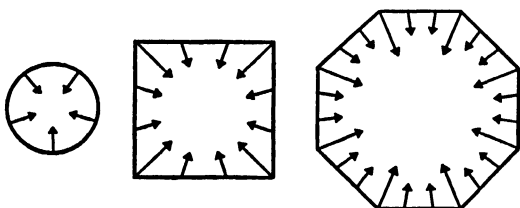
### THE GRAVITATIONAL PULL OF THE GROUP

No matter how good you may think yourself, there is almost always someone in the group of even your "own people" who rates you far lower than you rate yourself or than he rates himself. You remember that we have just talked about "shining" within your own group, and the fact that there seems to develop a cumulative group judgment against the individual who shines too brightly, and too often. That person eventually finds himself "kicked upstairs" into another league.

This is so, I think, because group opinion tends to encourage agreement with majority opinion and to inhibit disagreement. In any group there are always some individuals whose knowledge and judgment are superior to the average of the others. Groups, then, are not made up of a dead level but of variants from an average level of knowledge and experience, with some individuals better and some lower and some in between. What the majority of the group think about a given topic determines to a large extent the thinking of the whole group, for, as I have said, group judgment and opinion tend to favor majority thinking and tend to inhibit disagreement. Another way of saying this is that most of the group members conform, and whatever

group we may find ourselves in we tend to conform to the patterns of thinking and acting set by the majority of the group. When we are too much at odds with the majority thinking of one group we gravitate toward another group where the pattern is closer to our own. It is a kind of gravitational pull.

Figure IX illustrates the point that, no matter what the size and shape of the group, the pull is toward the center of the group. *For without this pull there would be no group.*



### IN ANY GROUP THE PULL IS TOWARD THE CENTER

FIG. IX

#### YOU ARE NOT "PULLED DOWN"

Before you jump to the conclusion that this is what is wrong with democracy—that the majority pull the better members down to their own level—let me hasten to add this fact. There are many hundreds and thousands of groups. There is hardly a village or hamlet in America so small that there are not at least a dozen or so different groupings among the citizens. Therefore, whoever you may be and wherever you may be, there is no need to feel "pulled down," for there are always different leagues in which you may work and play.

This matter of group judgment, when tested, shows some surprising results. Granted that there are always some individuals whose knowledge and judgment is superior, nevertheless,

*group knowledge and group judgment are higher than the independent thinking of most of the group members taken individually.*

A mathematical demonstration of this point may make it clearer. Suppose there are ten persons in a group, nine of whom scored, say, 50 on a given test. The total score of these nine would be 450 points. If the tenth person scored 100, the total score for the group would be 550 points, or an average of 55! The tenth person would have to score only 10 points higher than the other nine to raise the average for the group by one whole point. This is mathematically so, you will say, but it has nothing to do with group judgment or group opinion, especially in the realms where independent opinions play so great a part, as in art and aesthetics.

Experiments have shown just the opposite of what you might think. A large group of persons were tested as to the relative values, artistically speaking, of a set of objects and arrangements of objects, listing their preferences in order. Independently experts in the field, whose knowledge and judgment were highly respected, also had ranked the various items in the tests. The scores of the group members were compared with the ranking given by the experts, and the results showed that *taken as a whole* the group score was higher than the score of most of the individuals within the group. As other groups were tested, the combined scores of all groups averaged closer and closer to the rankings given by the experts.

Different tests, but comparable with the first, were given. This time, however, instead of asking each group member to judge independently, there was group discussion and interchange of opinion concerning the various items to be judged. Following this method, it was shown that the score of each

group was considerably closer to expert ranking than before. In other words, something had altered the independent judgments of individuals toward a better total result. Although the few "good" ones in the group may have had their scores "pulled down" somewhat by group opinion, the net effect was that "good" ones raised the level of group judgment considerably.

If, therefore, you ever have the feeling of being "pulled down" you may console yourself with the thought that the net result of this pull is partly to raise the group total. The conference discussion may profit greatly by the contributions you can make toward solving the problem and at the same time, if there are others whose knowledge is superior even to your own, you and the others will profit by what they say.

#### CLIMBING ON THE BANDWAGON

We all like to be on the winning side, no matter what the situation may be. Perhaps the psychological explanation for the act of "climbing on the bandwagon" is that one wishes to identify oneself with the majority for fear of group disapproval and group rejection. In this connection you may be amused by the story of the Democratic Party leader who was being teased about his "bandwagon" activities, for he had previously opposed the nomination of a successful candidate. "That's nothing," this leader is reported to have said, "it's just that I have what might be called 20-20 hindsight."

The individual tends to follow what he senses to be the majority opinion within the group. This seems to be so even where majority opinion is at variance with the opinions of outside experts. It does not matter much whether these outside experts are recognized as such, for members seem to be less influenced by them than they are by the thinking of the majority

of their fellow members within the group. The pull toward conformity is too strong for any but the most rugged individualists.

How many times have you noticed this in conference discussion? The leader of a minority faction will give in with as good grace as he can when he sees his followers deserting him. "Well, I don't want to be a stick-in-the-mud," he will say, "so I'll go along with the rest of the crowd." Reluctantly he climbs aboard the bandwagon, and his prestige is not diminished one bit thereby. Everyone realizes in his heart that he would do the same under similar circumstances.

#### "COMFORTABLY RIGHT"—IN YOUR OWN GROUP

There is, then, a strong gravitational pull toward conformity. This means that not only must one person not excel too much and too often but also that one person must not fail too much and too often. This might lead, as a friend of mine feared, to a dead level of mediocrity ("comfortably wrong with the majority" was the way he put it) except for the fact that there are available to any person many groups with which he can ally himself. If the standards of conformity in one group are too rigid for your taste, you can always find another group less rigid. Conversely, you can always find a stricter group if you find the standards of your present associates too lax to suit you. So long as there are always different and higher leagues for you to work and play in, you need not fear that your powers are being stifled.

#### HOW WE RATE OURSELVES

Another interesting fact about people in groups we have already alluded to, the fact that most people in your group will rate you and your abilities lower than you would rate yourself.

We usually give ourselves the benefit of the doubt when we are judging our abilities and capacities.

Some people tend to judge themselves too harshly and end up as unhappy souls convinced that they have "failed." As we have noted, the waiting rooms of psychiatrists' offices are full of just such persons. In many instances, however, it can be shown that they have set up impossible and unattainable standards which they apply discriminately to themselves but indiscriminately to others. Most of us may be neurotic at times and about certain subjects, but it is not the neurotics that I wish to talk about. No, this chapter is for those who feel themselves to be just average normal human beings trying to get along as best they can in a world which seems to be full of other people like themselves. Abraham Lincoln is reputed to have remarked that the Lord must love the common people for He made so many of them!

Therefore, being just an average person you find it easy to recognize the person who stands head and shoulders above the crowd. He's pretty good, you think, and you would give him a score of 90-95 points on a scale rating his total abilities and capacities. What would your own score be? Oh, maybe about 70, say, or perhaps 75. On second thought it might be, say, about 78 or 80. The other fellow is good, sure, but look at the advantages he's had, and if I had just had the chance. . . . Never mind, we all do it, and we just can't help ourselves. We just can't help thinking "if only . . ."

### HOW OTHERS RATE US

The next time you find yourself in a group thinking that, pull yourself up short by remembering that everybody else feels exactly the same way about himself. Some of the group are

envious of you for your abilities. They feel that they could be as good as you are at certain skills if they had had your opportunities. But—and here is another curious thing—they probably envy you for the qualities that you think little of, and rate you lower than themselves in those qualities in which you think you excel. This may startle you. Perhaps it is true that you excel in those respects where you think you do, but the gravitational pull toward conformity within the group will inevitably influence their thinking. Your luster will be dimmed in that regard while their respect for your capacities may easily cause them to regard you highly for entirely other qualities.

***HOW HE RATES HIMSELF***



***HOW HIS FRIENDS RATE HIM***

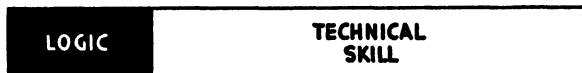


FIG. X

I know a technical man who is highly respected for his technical knowledge although, as he himself realizes, he has been long out of technical school and long separated from dealing with concrete objects and their physical relationships. However, he prides himself upon his power of logic and insists that “logic” be applied to the solution of every problem. His friends smile at this, for most of them have the opinion that his “logic” is his weakest point and that his “logic” frequently leads him to absurd conclusions. How he rates himself and how his friends rate him are shown in Fig. X.

I know another person, a beautiful and gifted woman, who has frequently told me that she suffers extreme embarrassment and almost cold shivers of fright at meeting strangers and on being thrown into a group of strangers. It so happens that most of her friends, including myself, admire her poise and her easy ability to thaw a stranger's defenses. And so it goes. Our friends are likely to think well of us for qualities which we do not realize we possess. Conversely, they are prone to rate us lower than we think for some of what we consider our best traits. If that is true of the other fellow, it is also true of you.

#### A CONFERENCE IS JUST A GROUP

Perhaps you have been wondering what all this has to do with conference discussion. Perhaps you have been saying to yourself that all this might hold true and be applicable to ordinary conversation and ordinary everyday dealings with other people, but how about group discussion? Isn't that another kettle of fish? No, same kettle, same fish. People are people, and people in a conference also are people. If it is true that group judgment tends toward conformity regardless of the group, then it is also true for a conference group. There may be some changes wrought upon the individuals within a conference group because they feel that they have a certain part to play, because they feel that they must represent a bloc of constituents, because they feel that they are speaking for others besides themselves. But it is well to remember that a conference group is still a group of people. What those changes just referred to are and what effects they have will be studied in the next chapter, but for the moment it is important to bear in mind that a conference group and a discussion group exert the same pressures upon the individual as does any group.



Much more than that, of course, for they also stimulate the individual and help him to think of many aspects of the problem which he might easily neglect by himself. In other words, if the group does exert a pressure toward conformity, at the same time the stimulation of group thinking tends to liberate the individual from the bondage of his limited capacities.

## CHAPTER 8

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### ROLE PLAYING

ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE  
AND ALL THE MEN AND WOMEN MERELY PLAYERS.  
THEY HAVE THEIR EXITS AND THEIR ENTRANCES;  
AND ONE MAN IN HIS TIME PLAYS MANY PARTS.

#### EACH HAS MANY ROLES

Have you ever had the experience of feeling as though something was expected of you but you were not quite sure just what? You fumbled around with what you were saying because you were listening hard for some clue as to what you were expected to say. It is a common experience. Have you ever felt that everyone was looking at you when you entered a roomful of people and that they all expected you to act in a certain way? Maybe they anticipated that you would be funny, and for the life of you you couldn't think of a bright and cheerful remark. Maybe they expected you to be quiet and mousy when you wanted to shout hello to all your friends. Have you ever been in the situation where you felt that you "didn't know how to act"? If you knew what was expected of you, you knew how to act.

Everyone has these experiences at times. The reason is that far from having just one *Self*, we all have several *Selves*, all rolled into one. In different situations we play different parts.

Role playing is not good or bad, not something to be ashamed of or proud of. It is a part of the business of living with people, and a necessary part of being oneself. At one time we are called upon to play one kind of part, while later in the day we are called upon to play another part. What we say and do in each of these parts or roles almost always has to be tailored to fit the part. It is almost as though some Divine Playwright had written the lines for us to speak and we went through the motions without a great deal of choice.

### ROLES IN FAMILY LIFE

Does this sound fantastic? Consider for a moment the various parts a married woman with children must play. She is wife, helpmate, and companion to her husband, and what she says and does in this particular role may make all the difference in the world between a happy marriage and another divorce case. She also has the role of manager of the household and is responsible for the smooth routine functioning of family life. She is mother, guide, teacher, and disciplinarian to her children. She is nurse and comforter to the sick. She is good neighbor and helper to friends and relatives in trouble. She is each of these things under varying conditions every day.

In which of these cases is she her *real self*? All day long she is *being something* to somebody.

Consider the man of the house. Perhaps because of the many demands of business or working life he has even more roles to play than his wife. Thus, a man may be "boss" to his subordinates and a good loyal henchman to his superiors, while to his equals he is just one of the gang. At home he is (in part at least) the male protector of the homestead; the provider; friend, husband, and lover to his wife; teacher, judge, and even sheriff

to his children. In the community he is a householder and a taxpayer, perhaps a churchgoer and an ardent proponent of a political party. In any event, a man whose opinion is entitled to some respect. He may be any or all of these, as circumstances may demand. These are some of the many roles he is called upon to play—not just once, but every day.

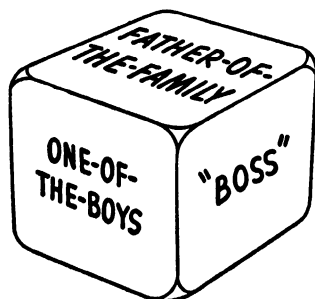
Children quickly learn the business of role playing. All too soon the infant learns that the role of absolute tyrant usually gets him what he wants when he wants it. In their make-believe games children are constantly playing parts, and they shift from one role to another with astonishing rapidity and ease. They soon learn how to “handle” their parents and their older relatives, that there are many and various ways of “getting around the old man.” All one has to do is to play the right part at the right time. Children playing “school” and children playing “grownup” are not just imitating. They are learning through play the roles they will be assuming in earnest later in life.

### YOU ARE A WHOLE SELF

You are a whole Self. Your personality is one and indivisible. In other words, you are you, even though all day long and every day you have to think and act and talk like different persons. You can't be the same when you're “out with the boys” as you are when giving directions and making decisions as “boss” of your staff. The “boys” don't expect that kind of behavior of you and they won't take it, either. If you consistently carry over “boss” manners and authority when you are just one of the gang, the “boys” will soon begin leaving you out of their gatherings. Conversely, if you carry over your “one of the boys” behavior and thinking into the role of supervisor, your subordinates will soon lose their respect for your authority. They

will think, "Aw, he doesn't mean that. I'll do it the way I want it." Except on special occasions, like a company picnic, it is next to impossible for a supervisor to be "one of the gang" with his subordinates all evening and get any work out of his crew the next day. Because this is so, the "big boss" of a corporation or a large union is one of the loneliest persons on earth.

You probably have not thought much about how many different parts you can play and do play. You recognize often that certain ways of talking and acting are demanded of you, but you



**NO MATTER WHICH SIDE IS UP IT'S THE SAME CUBE**

FIG. XI

probably have not realized how many different roles you must assume in the everyday drama of life. With these many roles, these many selves, you are still one person, one whole self. (See Fig. XI.)

#### SHIFTING ROLES

Every day is something like a play, and we are the actors. Circumstances and other people force us into these parts, and we switch from one to another without realizing that we are bringing a different facet of our personality into focus. With

each new group our personality shifts a little, and our thinking and talking—and hence our behavior—are modified to fit the pattern of the new part.

Many of the difficulties of interpersonal relationships arise from this shifting of roles. Not from the fact of the shifting, for that is continuous and inevitable, but from the carry-over of a particular role into circumstances where a different part is in order. The merry jester and the gag man is as out of place at a funeral as a death's-head is at a gay party. The mother who carries over her role as household manager into managing the lives and thoughts of her children is sure to bring either herself or them to grief, possibly both. (Of course, if women would just stop doing this one thing, many novelists and storytellers would be out of business.) The father who carries his office attitudes home to his children is not going to get far at understanding them or they him.

In the same way, the plant executive who carries his executive-ness into a conference with his employees may, it is true, get his own way, but he is sure to arouse fear and resentment and opposition. Such an executive may succeed in "winning them over," but he frequently mistakes submission for agreement. The idea of agreement carries with it willingness and confidence, while submission implies mistrust and resentment.

### CONSISTENCY IS NO JEWEL

In many group situations, this shifting of roles does not matter much, and if you have observed people in action you realize that consistency is far from being a jewel. Complete consistency of thought and action hardens a person into one whom others find it almost impossible to get along with. You almost want to murder the irrepressible prankster. At times you

scorn or pity the man who is so obsessed with a serious purpose that he can never have fun or be "human." There are times when the group wants and needs from you your keenest analytical thinking with no punches pulled. There are other times when, to get the whole group over a serious hurdle, the group wants and needs from you a compromise, not necessarily of your principles but of your immediate desires. There are times when team play demands that you run interference for the other fellow. There are times when you may seize the ball and make a touchdown.

#### THE ROLE OF "CHAMPION"

There may be times, too, when you feel called upon to act as "champion" of a worthy cause. The representative of states' rights may even think of himself as the champion of moral purity, of "white southern womanhood." The labor leader going into a wage contract conference is frequently cast in the role of champion. He becomes the defender not only of his immediate group in a given plant but also, perhaps, of an international union and its policies. Indeed, he may even think of himself as the defender of the "downtrodden masses of wage slaves." The representative of business management going into such a conference may be another champion, the defender not only of his own and his company's policies but also of "free enterprise and the American way of life."

There is no more implacable foe than your champion, especially the one who is the defender of his "way of life," his church or his creed, his home and hearthside, or his country. He gives no quarter and asks none. He would be glad, literally, to see his enemy dead at his feet. If given an advantage, he presses it to the utmost. If worsted in a skirmish, he still con-

tinues to fight. He may be forced to yield, forced to accept arbitration, forced to bow to the opinion of the judges. But there is no conciliation. The cessation of the battle is at best a precarious truce, a truce to be broken the instant a momentary advantage incites the contenders to further strife.

### WHEN CHAMPIONS MEET

The "conference" table, when two champions meet, becomes the jousting field of the medieval tournament. The two champions back off and then charge at each other full gallop and with lances leveled. There is a gallery of interested spectators (the public) which awaits the issue, patiently or breathlessly. No matter which side you favor at a battle of champions, your side is the side made up of *right, truth, justice, and freedom*, while the other side consists of liars, cheats, thieves—in short, of no-goods.

Such a "conference" is no conference, but a battle. There is no meeting of minds to solve a common problem, but a clash of arms. There is no real agreement, but the triumph of superior strength. In such a "conference," nothing is ever settled. Even though the victor may be granted most of his demands, he knows the truce is but a breathing spell before another, fiercer onslaught.

### PUTTING ON AN ACT

Certain roles may be "out of character" for certain individuals. For example, the habitually timid and meek person will usually react in much the same way in most situations, although there may be some instances when he will get his back up and make an unexpectedly firm stand on a certain question. Caspar Milquetoast so consistently surrounds himself with precautions



that he rarely has any fun and often gets nothing done all day because he is waiting around for the worst to happen. Some people, it seems, have difficulty in making decisions and would far rather take orders than give them. Such people, when observed in the role of boss, seem out of character. They may almost be "putting on an act"—an expression which means that we are doing and saying things out of character in order to achieve an effect. In other words, we are pretending to be angry when the situation seems to call for it although we are not feeling angry at the moment. "Putting on an act" as a means for getting your own way strikes me as the essence of insincerity, for this is deliberate and false adaptation to a situation.

How, then, are we to distinguish sincere adaptation from insincere? Is the salesman who is hail-fellow-well-met with one customer and solemn-Joe with the next an insincere adaptation or sincere? Part of the answer lies in the deliberateness with which he does as he thinks the situation demands. "Putting on an act" is a deliberate effort to influence others through pretending to think and feel as we do not.

#### AS OTHERS SEE US

Would you like to see yourself as some keen observers and imitators see you? Listen to your children as they are playing "grownup," but don't let them catch you at the eavesdropping. Listening to children as they are playing "school" will give you some insight as to the way your children are being taught. Even your best friend will not always tell you when you're making a fool of yourself—it is too great a strain upon the ties of friendship. He may observe your actions in a situation and

think how badly you are behaving, but he will rarely tell you so to your face.

But observe children in action. Where did little Mary learn that petulant expression but from her elders? How could she have learned that horrid pout except from observation? I do not really know the inside story of what goes on in the home of some of my neighbors. The family consists of mother, teenage son, and younger daughter. I have never been in their house, but I can guess fairly well something of their family life from the habitual scowls and pouts of the boy and girl. Again, I can only guess at the family life of another set of neighbors where the children seem always gay and happy and smiling, but my guess is that mother and father are gay and happy too.

#### GETTING ON WITH PEOPLE

The business of learning to get along with people demands of you that you understand the parts you are called upon to play under different sets of conditions or circumstances. The Apostle may have had this in mind when he wrote: "I am made all things to all men." The conscious adaptation of yourself to the immediate situation is the beginning of getting along with people.

It is fairly simple to learn to get along with various individuals one at a time, but people in groups are another matter. In groups, people tend to be on guard, to be wary of doing or saying anything that will give them away. It is only when the spirit of "own people" completely prevails that the last evidences of this wariness melts in the warmth of feeling at home. As a friend of mine put it concerning some mutual acquaintances: "I like those people. They're the kind of people with

whom you can make a fool of yourself without being made to feel foolish, if you see what I mean."

### ACCEPTANCE COMES FIRST

What my friend meant was, I think, that they accepted him at his face value, without insisting upon putting their own interpretation upon everything he said and did. Acceptance of others at their own face value is the beginning of getting along with people in groups. We are all human beings, and this means that we all make ~~mistakes, all kinds of mistakes~~ from errors in observation to ~~errors in judgment~~. This means not only that *I* make mistakes and *he* makes mistakes, but also that you make ~~mistakes—not just once but often~~. And as you would have other people overlook your errors and take you for what you are and for what you mean to be, so you should accept others for what they are and what they mean or hope to be.

Reserve your opinions and your judgments for a while. You have an immediate impression of a person when meeting him for the first time, but that impression need not harden itself into a judgment until some time later. Acceptance of this individual means that you are not going to let a swarthy skin or a hooked nose or kinky hair or even a pair of candid blue eyes and a dazzling smile harden your opinion until you have had a chance to observe and listen to this person. Acceptance of individuals at their face value is the key to overcoming prejudice, for the simple and original meaning of prejudice is judging beforehand. *Acceptance comes even before understanding, for unless you are willing to begin accepting people first, you will never begin to understand them.* Acceptance, then, is the beginning of getting along with people, not only as individuals but also in groups.

## ACCEPTING INDIVIDUALS NOT ROLES

A good beginning of the conference will be made when the members of the group accept one another for what they are. This means accepting people at their face value rather than accepting what they seem to stand for. We get this impression of people "standing for" something (an idea, a point of view, a cause, etc.) from the role they bring with them into the conference situation. *Accepting individuals is quite apart from accepting the roles they may be playing.* Just as one may hope that God will love the sinner though He hates the sin, so we on our much smaller scale may accept the person without necessarily accepting the role he seems to represent.

When the conference opens, there may be some who are uncertain as to what is expected of them. Their uncertainty will make them cautious and wary. If all the rest reply to their caution with caution, the conference will take a long time to "warm up." If the others reply to their caution with acceptance and with friendly acceptance, the "warming-up" process will be greatly speeded.

There may be others in the group as it assembles who seem quite sure of their place and quite certain of the part they are expected to play. Almost invariably we tend to confuse the individual with the role, and because we happen to like the role we tend to like the person playing it.

## WHY WE REJECT SOME

You remember how when you were young it was easy for you to confuse the villain of the play or the movie with the actor who played the part. You remember also how you loved the actor who was the hero. Unfortunately, the motion-picture

industry was prone to fasten certain parts upon certain actors until it was almost impossible to tell one from the other. Because Ray Milland did such a marvelous job as an alcoholic in the *The Lost Weekend* naïve persons were surprised to learn that in real life he was not an alcoholic. The better actors and actresses refuse to be cast in the same role over and over again, for they can play many parts and want the opportunity to do so.

Some persons in the conference may be cast—or, what is often the case, may cast themselves—in parts to which we tend to react unfavorably because we have already formed a dislike for the role to be played. Especially is this so when these persons are in the role of representing some group or some idea. Because we dislike the idea represented we tend to dislike the representative. And give that representative some mannerism or physical characteristic which we regard as unpleasant, and we are all set to reject utterly both the person and the role. If others in the conference concur in this rejection (if others, that is, line themselves on our side), the meeting is off to a slow start indeed. Our rejection turns his tentative acceptance of us into rejection on his part, for rejection works both ways as does acceptance. If we would be received at our own face value, then we must ourselves be willing to receive, for one cannot both reject and be received at the same time—not, that is, by other human beings like ourselves.

### THE CONFERENCE ROLE

The conference meeting is a special situation which in itself makes demands upon those who would confer. The situation forces upon those present a role different from other roles in daily life. In a conference meeting, then, you are expected to think and act and talk in ways not quite the same as your

behavior in other situations. The conference leader or chairman has the important task of developing this conference role among the group, and the members have also the responsibility of learning what is expected of them and patterning their behavior accordingly. Thus, the act of coming to the conference table means that you are going to think and talk and act in certain special ways, the purpose of your behavior being to contribute to the solution of the problem facing the meeting.

Now, it is unlikely that the chairman (or the other group members, for that matter) is going to affect permanent changes in the lives and characters of those present at the meeting. That is, it is doubtful whether the "bossy" man or woman is going to be permanently less "bossy" after one conference meeting. It is enough, however, if he or she restrains the "bossiness" during the meeting. That quality, like anger, aggressiveness, spite, prejudice, and so on, is incompatible with what may be called the "conference role." The chairman, then, is more concerned with the behavior of the conference members at the time of the meeting than he is with their conduct afterward.

An example from the field of sport may serve to clarify this. The football coach is greatly concerned with developing teamwork on the field during practice and the game. If, afterward, his team wishes to become social prima donnas, that is something he cannot control and probably should not attempt to control. It is enough, then, that the members exhibit teamwork while they are in the business of being a team. In the same way, it is enough if the conference leader and the group members exhibit teamwork and the spirit of acceptance and co-operation during the conference.

Friendliness is another component of the conference role. It does not matter so much whether a group member can actually

be friendly. What matters is that for the purpose of the conference role he must assume the attitude of friendliness.

*The conference role is the opposite of the champion's role.* When you have champions, you have a battle and not a conference. Of the champion we like to say that he gives as good as he gets. But of the group member it may be said that he should try harder to understand what others are saying than to convince them of the accuracy and cogency of his own thoughts and judgments. The conference role, then, implies a willingness to get as good as (or better than) one gives. It may be, as Christ's doctrine holds, more blessed to give than to receive, but it is infinitely harder to receive well and graciously and understandingly than to give. Especially is this so when what you are giving is a "piece of your mind."

## CHAPTER 9

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### CONFLICT IN CONFERENCE DISCUSSION

You have read the three fundamental rules for being a good group member: *listen, avoid meaningless chatter, and be yourself.* There may be other rules which you can add to the list; if so, then be sure to include them. If you have begun to practice these rules you have already learned that it becomes easier and easier to get along with people. Not only do you begin to understand them, but also they seem to understand you better and to like you more.

You have also studied the behavior of people in groups, and from this you have discovered that what you get from your dealings with others is in large part dependent upon what you put into that relationship. But not everybody in the meetings you attend will know what you have learned and what you have begun to put into practice. Inevitably conflicts will arise, and it will help our understanding of people to study the sources of conflict and how to deal with conflict in a group situation.

#### DIFFERENCES IN EXPERIENCE

We laugh at the story of the three blind men who examined an elephant. The first blind man examined the elephant's



trunk, while the second took hold of his leg, and the third, his tail. And we can imagine the heated "discussion" these men must have had in reporting their experiences:

"I tell you an elephant is like a big fat wriggly snake."

"Not at all, my friend, not at all. It is like a thin rope."

"You are both mistaken. It is like a tree."

"Who's mistaken? Did you feel it?"

"I did and it was like the trunk of a tree."

"But I held it in my hand and it had a fuzzy end like a raveled rope."

"Held it in your hand! Why, I could hardly get both arms around it. You're crazy!"

"You're both crazy, for it wriggled like a snake."

"I'm not crazy. You are, for it was as solid and as big around as the bole of an oak."

"My friend, I'd hate to call you a liar, but . . ." And so the battle was on.

Now, these three men were "in conference" and they were discussing a "big problem," but as each one's experience with the problem was radically different from that of the others, they could hardly credit one another's reports. Instead of accepting each experience as a part of a larger whole, each began attacking the veracity of the others. And why not? How could something that felt like the raveled end of a rope also be as solid and sturdy as a tree?

#### DIFFERENCES IN REPORTS

In the discussion of any large problem there are bound to be different reports on circumstances that must first be assembled into some co-ordinated pattern. We often fail to see how another person looking at the same set of facts as we have

examined could report a different story. Didn't he see what we saw? Evidently not, for his story is different from ours. The stories of any given group of individuals vary considerably not only one from another but also from the exact account of what happened. There have been many experiments to prove this, and you have only to recall from your own experience in listening to a friend report what the two of you have seen to understand that this is so. Your friend says that thus-and-so happened and is quite positive that you are wrong in saying it happened the other way around, so first and then *thus*. You were both there, you both "saw with your own eyes," and yet the reports differ. Your friend must be mistaken, for you are positive. So is he, so you must be wrong.

Here is one of the danger spots in conference discussion. Here is the opportunity either to begin a good battle or to begin the fascinating process of trying to think together. The battle could begin, as I have indicated earlier, by one person simply saying, "You're crazy. This is what happened." And the one who is called "crazy" is not going to back down easily or quickly for fear of admitting that he is crazy. From the step "You're crazy" it is an easy step to "You're a liar," and then the battle is really on.

To avoid conflict at this point it isn't enough to refrain from saying that the other person is crazy or a liar. No matter how polite and subtle you are: "I feel you must be mistaken . . ." or (with a laugh) "'Tain't the way I heerd it," and so on. The fact remains that the other person recognizes that you doubt his word, and naturally he must insist upon his report in order to maintain his own integrity, even his belief in himself. He has to keep faith with himself, so to speak, by casting doubt upon you.

Right here is the spot to remember the old saying that there are two sides to every question. Not *after* the argument, when you both feel unhappy and want to patch things up, *but before* the argument starts. Remember also that there are usually many more than two sides to a big question. There may be as many sides as there are persons in the group. In other words, such differences in reporting are inevitable and should be taken for granted. In fact, a good group chairman will usually encourage differing reports in order to get a fuller picture of all the possible circumstances. But instead of thinking that the other fellow must be blind or crazy or lying if he doesn't see what you saw, simply accept his report at its face value—as you would have your report accepted. By doing this you assume the other person's integrity rather than to insist on your own. Is this too great an assumption on your part? Do you know him from many past experiences to be a man of honor and of truth?

The other fellow's report, then, and your report and the report of the next person become a part of the total group report on the subject in hand. All these reports are necessary in order that the group may comprehend the scope of the problem.

#### DIFFERENCES OF OPINION

Now the reports are all in, as many as can be had, and as full a picture of the circumstances as possible has now been assembled. Again there are differences, but this time not as to the reports or the facts but as to what interpretation to put on them. The various pieces form themselves into one kind of pattern for you and into another kind of pattern for someone else. Each of you interprets the whole from the vantage point of your own knowledge and experience—and you come out with *different answers!* Can this be so? Yes, it happens all the time, and if it were not so it would be stranger still!

It wouldn't be so bad, would it, if only the other person were less positive that he is right? You are "broad-minded," of course. You are willing to admit that possibly you may be wrong in your interpretation, but the other chap is so very sure! You don't dare give in an inch, because then he will crowd you to the wall. He is beginning to crowd you a little anyhow, so you might as well make a fight here as anywhere. And so you lash out at him, and he cracks back at you; others join in either on your side or on his, and once again the fight is on. "No sane person looking at these figures could possibly make such a stupid remark as you have." "You don't know what you're talking about." "What burns me up is that you're so cocksure about everything."

#### DIFFERENCES ARE A CHALLENGE

Well, the fight is on and, from the way it has started, it promises to be a good one. While it is raging, let us go back to examine the possible intellectual effect of these differences. To begin with, a difference in reporting may recall to one's mind even more circumstances than were first remembered. In other words, the first effect is a sharpening of our wits and a greater alertness in observation, for we are responding to the stimulus of a challenge. The challenge may have been friendly, and if so, it stimulates our thinking processes.

We respond also with our whole bodies as well as our minds to a challenge. There is a physiological effect too. Our blood runs faster, our senses are more alert, we are more sensitive to stimuli of all kinds, we sit up a little straighter, our muscles tend to tighten, perhaps only a little. This physical alertness in our bodies helps us to think faster and harder, and we begin to pull new fact and new reason out of our experience to strengthen our previous point. Perhaps the challenge was a

simple question: "Why do you think so?" Perhaps it was a little sharper: "Can you verify that statement?" At any rate, now our minds are working harder and faster as the result of our friend's difference in reporting and in interpreting, as the result of the challenge.

The challenge may be only a mild challenge and may be only implied, and in any case it is not seen as so threatening to our physical and mental security as is a threat, say, to personal safety. Nevertheless, to a mild degree the physical reaction is the same. The challenge does make our blood run a little faster and does to some slight degree cause us to tense our muscles just as does recognizable danger.

The beginning of a building up of tension is there, but that tension does no harm so long as the challenges are kept on a purely intellectual level, so long, that is, as our security and our integrity are not in any way threatened. In other words, so long as we have no reason to be afraid for one instant. And we are not afraid in a warm, friendly, smiling atmosphere. Thus, so long as there is not the slightest hint of any hostility, the tension is slight and finds its release in a quickening of our thinking processes.

#### THE FIRST SIGN OF HOSTILITY

What happens to change all this? The first hint is usually a slight degree of formality in the remarks being made. Our friend, who always calls us Ned, now uses Edward, or our last name, Jones. Or even Mr. Jones. This slight shift in the atmosphere toward formality puts us instantly more on the alert, causes an increase in the blood supply, and we watch for signs of hostility. Human nature being what it is, such signs are not hard to find, and being more than ever on the alert,

we may easily discover more than is there. The discovery of these signs induces a slight frostiness, a bleakness, into our own smile, and a chill begins to come into the atmosphere.

Now we are very much alive and sensitive to danger. Our security and our *Self*, which we are always trying to protect, are seen to be in some danger. We arm ourselves. Our muscles tighten still more. Even though we decide to flee the danger (since one can only run from or fight danger) we must still keep a strong armed guard on our retreat. If we decide to stand up and fight the threat, we are gathering as rapidly as possible the weapons we may need. Our friend, sensing the situation, may offer a truce and so indicate by using "Ned" again. If the truce is real and if we accept it, the storm may blow over and the sun shine warmly again. But if we think it only a ruse to break past our outer wall of defense, we will reject the truce and remain on the watch for more hostile signs. The stage is now set for an attack by either party, and the most usual form of attack is polite name calling: "How could any sane person . . ." These personal attacks are exactly that, attacks on the person rather than upon his ideas or opinions.

#### "KIDDING" IS A DANGER SIGN

There is some danger in too great an informality among the group, for that may lead to "kidding" and joshing and greatly delay a serious approach to the problem in hand. "Kidding," too, may for all its apparent informality and friendliness uncover sore spots or wound the sensibilities of thin-skinned persons. In fact, one of the favorite methods of attack by some persons is to make an unpleasant remark and cover it instantly by "I was only kidding, of course." Whether these persons are really adroit and know what they are doing, I have often won-

dered. Some do it so frequently that I think it must be a habit, but with others I suspect it shows hostility.

### MORE DANGER SIGNS

"Kidding," then, may be a danger sign, and certain others have been mentioned or implied. The sudden use of formal address where previously the informal first names were used is a warning to the good group member that all is not well. If your next neighbor is fidgeting with papers while you talk, you may suspect that he is physically working off some of the tension that is mounting in him. He may not be aware of it, and indeed he often is not. If instead of fidgeting and squirming in his chair he gets up to open windows, adjust fans, empty ash trays, pour water, it may be that the physical discomforts indicated by his movements are such as to distract his attention completely or it may well be that what you and the others are saying has increased his tension to the point where he must find relief.

Watch those persons whom you know to be habitually fidgety, for they will give you clues that something is wrong. Watch also for signs of frostiness in the smiles of the group members. Some individuals give you a clue by going "dead pan," others by veiling their eyes either by half shutting or with their hands. These are some of the signs of wariness and the beginnings of hostility. So is, curiously enough, a folding of the arms, for this represents a hugging to oneself of one's inner defenses.

### TWO KINDS OF CONFLICT

With all these storm warnings flying about, how do we interpret them? Do they point to different kinds of conflict? If there is such a thing as "conflict in ideas," we want that kind of conflict. We want as many interpretations, as many different

slants on the subject as we can get. What we do not want is conflict among persons. Here we want a high degree of trust and faith and mutual good will of one group member for another.

Is there any fundamental difference between politeness (good manners) and good will? Some writers on manners and etiquette assert that good manners and good will are hardly distinguishable. Some descriptions of "the old-school gentleman" imply that his politeness stems from unfailing good humor and an almost personal interest in the welfare of others. Unfailing good humor, which doesn't mean wisecracks, is a great asset possessed, alas, by only a few fortunate souls and, true enough, good humor will take care of most delicate situations. But for most of us our good humor is not unfailing, and because of this we have to fall back upon what passes for ordinary politeness.

Ordinary politeness is all right, and it assists us in our day-to-day living. But politeness, especially excessive politeness, is frequently used as a weapon of aggression.

Have you ever observed it? What happens is that the offender is excessively polite toward his victim, is punctilious in observing the letter of the law, so to speak. No one could possibly object to what he says, but his tone and his manner are a direct attack upon the inner security of the other person.

Most of us realize this difference, I think, between excessive politeness and good will. We are prone in our hearts to overlook brusqueness, the forthrightness, the unintentional rudeness in a person whom we know to be sincere and a man of good will. Sophisticated writers sneer at the person who "means well." He blurts out unpleasant truths at awkward moments. He is painted as bungling and inept, spoiling with his big clumsy hands the fragile flowers of human relationships. But we can



forgive his blundering, forgive him wholly with a smile in our hearts as well as on our lips, for we know him to be honest and sincere. We know, too, that those who mean well can sometimes be taught better, can be taught (sometimes at least) not to talk at all. We find it harder, however much we try, to forgive sophisticated contempt for one's fellows, no matter how well clothed in impeccable "politeness." Thus, for all their clumsiness, most of us would rather cast our lot with the well-meaners, with men of good will, than with those whose brilliant minds are corroded with cynicism.

### NEVER TOO MUCH GOOD WILL

Can there be too much good will, too much "sweetness and light" in a group conference or committee discussion? Can there be so much that not all the necessary views and ideas will be presented? Perhaps there is some slight danger in this, but the danger is far greater of personality clashes or of antagonism and aggression underlying a thin veneer of "politeness." That hurdle is itself so great that all members of the conference should do their utmost to surmount it as the first requirement of doing business together. Having once surmounted that difficulty, the group may take up the inevitable and necessary conflicts in ideas.

### WHOSE IDEA WAS THAT?

The reason why conflicts in ideas so frequently bring about conflicts in personality is not hard to find. We identify ourselves with the words we have spoken. Thus, when I have spoken I have been giving my ideas. When you speak you give your ideas. When he speaks he gives his ideas. Therefore, when you attack my ideas, I have a hard time remembering that you are attacking the ideas and not me. Especially is this so when I have been

giving my "pet ideas." Naturally, when I feel that you are attacking me I will rise to defend myself.

By what right are my ideas *mine*? Did I discover them in some out-of-the-way place? Did I grow them in my own garden? Did I manufacture them from raw materials to finished product? The truth of the matter is that I have obtained my ideas from many, many sources. Some of these sources will be as recent as yesterday or even this morning, while others of the sources may be as remote as early school years or my mother's knee. If it had not been for hundreds and thousands of persons who lived before me and thought about similar problems, I would not have had these ideas which I so proudly speak forth as *mine*.

#### ALL IDEAS ARE GROUP IDEAS

The truth is, once I have spoken, my ideas are no longer mine but belong to him who listens. If these ideas seem good to him and he makes use of them, then they are part and parcel of him. And when he speaks them, those ideas belong to the next person who hears and acts upon them.

The truth is, *all ideas in group discussion are group ideas*.

It will help you greatly to relieve conflict in group meetings if you will remember that and act accordingly. When you have presented your opinion or your report or your argument, it belongs to the group. If the group wishes to accept an idea, or modify it, or even reject it for any reason, that is the responsibility and privilege of the group. The group may, and often will, wholly accept you and still reject an idea which you have brought forth. Group acceptance is of persons and not of "their" ideas.

Remember, too, it is possible that those particular ideas you mention would not have been stated (and certainly not in their present form) without the stimulus of this particular group at

this particular time. Try to train yourself toward the attitude that you are contributing to the group pool of ideas from which you and all the members can draw. Try to help other members to have the same attitude. Instead of saying to a member, "I agree with your idea," say something like this, "That helps clarify our thinking." Instead of saying, "Harry, I disagree with you," say something like this, "Harry, we will want to think that over carefully." Emphasize the we; emphasize the us. Emphasize the oneness of all the reports, opinions, ideas, and judgments of the group. In so doing you will be contributing greatly toward maintaining the necessary friendly feeling of "belonging" and the attitude of good will.

#### WHY NOT HAVE FAITH?

With all the good will in the world, the group may not get far with the solution to their problem. They may not have the necessary information or they may not know how to get it. What information they have may be faulty. They may be, as my friend put it, simply "pooling their ignorance." They may not know how to draw upon personal experience and upon history. They may be unaware of implications underlying plausible solutions offered. So long as they are not content with their ignorance, so long as they recognize that they may not know all the answers, I have faith that they will muddle through. The genuine desire to solve the problem and a wholehearted willingness to work together may not accomplish flashy miracles but will produce solid results in the end.

Why not, with Lincoln, have faith? He said:

"Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world?"

## **PART III**

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# **Co-operative Thinking to Solve Your Problems**



## CHAPTER 10

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### THE PERSUADER AT WORK IN A CONFERENCE

The first two parts of this book were devoted to helping you understand how to be a good group member and to the behavior of people in a group. Thus far it sounds as though most of the difficulties to be met in conference discussion were concerned with people. On the whole, that is true, and if you read no farther in this book than Parts I and II (plus this chapter) you will have a fair idea of how to conduct yourself in a conference and how to get something out of what might otherwise be an unproductive meeting.

But there is more to the story. Some of the reasons why conferences go astray are wrapped up in the way people ordinarily think and in the way they use words. Certain thought habits and certain language habits may block fruitful discussion at any time but operate as most effective blocks in a conference. These obstacles are discussed in the chapters that follow. In this Part III, too, you will find the "ideal" conference pattern and some concrete suggestions as to how to reach decisions through co-operative thinking.

Before we come to that, however, there is one more type of person you ought to know about, and that is the "persuader."

You will find the persuader in almost every conference you attend, and because he gets in the way of co-operative endeavor, I am dealing with him in the sections that follow.

### THE PERSUADER AND THE FARMER

The farmer spends a great deal of time preparing the soil to receive the seed he sows. He plows the ground, harrows it to break the large lumps into small ones, spreads fertilizer. He spends a large share of his time in preparation, about as much as he does in cultivating once the seed has sprouted. Just so, a person who wishes to persuade you to his way of thinking will first try to put you in the proper frame of mind to receive his message.

Do you wish to influence people to your way of thinking? Do you wish to persuade the group to adopt the measures you advocate? Then notice how the skillful persuader works to influence you. All day and every day there are many persuaders trying hard to influence your way of life, what you eat, what you wear, what you think, what you say, what you do.

These persuaders are not necessarily evil and sinister beings, although the term *propagandists* has a semisinister connotation. Advertisers are trying to persuade you to buy certain goods, and this is a legitimate part of our scheme of production and distribution. Ministers and teachers are trying to persuade you to adopt certain modes of thought and conduct. When I use the word *persuaders*, then, you will understand that I mean persuaders for good as well as propagandists with a subversive intent. Skillful persuasion and propaganda follow a general pattern, the outlines of which are not difficult to discern. A study of the influences that are being brought to bear upon you will help you to recognize some of the "tricks of the trade." From

this, it is hoped, you will develop your own ideas as to how to meet this problem in your conference discussions.

The skillful persuader knows that there is no use sowing good seed on unprepared ground. He will not flatter you grossly, but he will take good care to cultivate you. Much of the art of persuasion lies in this careful preparation, which must be done—sometimes delicately—so that you do not realize you are being “softened up” for the invasion.

### THE “YES” FRAME OF MIND

First of all he will get you to identify your interests with his. He may do this in a variety of ways, but the purpose is always the same. When he uses the word *we* he does not mean himself and his friends on one side as against you and your friends on the other. Oh, no! He means that you and he are the *we* he is talking about. As a part of this process he will try to get you into a “yes” frame of mind by stating a few general ideas that he is reasonably sure you will agree with. He will be careful not to give you the opportunity to say “no” to any of these opening remarks, for he knows that once you have said “no” it is much harder to get you to say “yes.”

He will use phrases like “all right-thinking people will agree that . . .” “those who believe in fair play will allow . . .” Naturally it is the rare individual who does not consider himself a right-thinking person. “Fair play” is a phrase almost everyone will wish to identify himself with. “We Americans” is another example, as is “the good people of” or the “good citizens of . . .” “The good citizens of Wilmette will be interested to know that . . .” It is but natural for you to wish to identify yourself with the good people, the good citizens of the community.



## TOWARD A BRIGHTER DAWN

I have probably given enough examples. You can think of numerous others from your own experience or your reading. The purpose of these expressions is the same. You and the persuader are on the same side. You and he are both going the same way along the same road. You and he both want the same things. Perhaps he is pointing out the path, but you and he are marching shoulder to shoulder. The marching may be toward the corner drugstore to buy a cake of that same soap used by all the lovely ladies of Hollywood, or you may be "Christian soldiers marching as to war." The purpose is to get you into an accepting frame of mind, and to accepting yourself as on his side and he on yours and both of you side by side with "all fair-minded persons."

The path down which you are now marching—you are not alone, for everybody who counts is with you—the path leads toward something better than what you are leaving behind. It may be toward universal peace, toward prosperity, toward a less sinful world, toward better housing for all. It may be only toward more automobiles at lower prices or toward a gadget that will banish forever the drudgery of washing dishes. It is human nature to wish for something better than one now has. There must be hope in the persuader's message, hope for a brighter future. You are leaving behind the dark night of waste, inefficiency, drudgery, sin, crime, conflict, fear. All that is being left behind as you march toward the dawn of a new day with its bright promise of the good things in life that we need and desire.

The persuader abandons to the scientist or to the pedant any use of the exact and limiting language of science. He sprinkles

his remarks with such words as "everybody," "all," "always," "never," "each and every." The exact scientist is usually wary of these words, for he recognizes the impossibility of a complete description of reality. He knows that the possible exceptions to "never" are many and varied. Not so the persuader. The persuader will not allow you to think of possible exceptions. If he does, then you yourself may be an exception, and then you may no longer be marching with him toward a brighter day.

### THE EITHER-OR CHOICE

If you are with him, if you are in an attitude of acceptance, then you are ready to hear what it is he wants you to think or believe or do. His proposition is presented simply without too many qualifications. To do thus-and-so will lead to peace. Do this and you will be beautiful. Buy this and you are guaranteed enjoyment. Nothing complicated about it. All simple and straightforward.

The persuader will blandly disregard the arguments against his proposition. He will imply that such arguments are of no significance. He may take up two or three contrary arguments and so distort their meaning that it becomes obvious to "any fair-minded person where the truth of the matter lies." His "reasons" for the proposition are less rational than emotional. They are appeals to action made by stirring your emotions.

Then, finally, he offers you an either-or choice. There are no halfway measures. The choice is either this (his promise, his proposition) or that. And *that* usually implies remaining in the Stygian darkness of chaos and despair, the dark ages of waste, inefficiency, and drudgery.

Perhaps some of the elements of the art of persuasion have been left out, but the main outlines are there. And if you will

examine any piece of writing that is intended to make you change your mind or is meant to influence your thinking or your action, you will find most of these points illustrated—but often far more subtly than I have indicated.

### THE PERSUADER IS “OFF THE TEAM”

There is plenty of room in this world for the persuader. As previously indicated, he fulfills a normal and useful function in the market place, the political arena, and perhaps even the classroom. But the persuader is out of place, out of order, and “off the team” in a conference discussion. He does not “belong.” In a conference discussion the job is analysis, creative thinking, testing out of consequences, and final decision. The persuader has his decision made before he enters the conference room. Conference discussion should end with decision and not begin with decision. *Therefore, the business of persuading is anti-thetical to the purpose of discussion.*

What can you do with a persuader in a conference group? In this connection I am thinking of a persuader as the person with a ready-made answer who spends most of his time trying to get the group to adopt his suggestions as the answers to the given problem. He is not an easy person to deal with, for if he has had any training and practice in his art, it will not always be readily apparent what he is trying to do.

### EXAMINE MOTIVES

One of the first things, of course, is to alert yourself to his purpose. Think of the illustrations I have just given you as danger flags indicating trouble ahead. Then try to fathom just why he should be trying to persuade the group toward the particular course advocated. What do you know of this person, his

background, and his experience in the area under discussion? Is there any reason behind his actions? He may have an ulterior motive, and if you can guess at or discover this, then you will be that much wiser in handling the situation.

Let us assume that he has no ulterior design at all, but that he is a sincere person motivated solely by a desire to see things come out the way he thinks they should. How can you deal with such a person in the conference group? The conference chairman can, of course, explain that it is a group decision that is being worked out and that the persuader's point of view is but one of many. This method will work in some instances.

Perhaps a more effective way is for the group members themselves to handle the situation. I suggest that you let this person talk *without interruption* and *without comment* until he has said most of what he wishes to say. Let me emphasize that interruption, argument, or comment will only prolong the situation and serve to develop emotional conflict. If you let this person talk uninterruptedly for as much as five or six minutes (a long time in a conference) you have afforded him the courtesy of listening to what he has to say. Then you or another of your group may say with courtesy and good will: "There is much of value in your point of view. Perhaps we shall come to it ourselves before we're through. But because I haven't had your experience and training in this field, there are one or two points that I'd like to get straightened out in my own mind first. One of them is . . ." and so back to the group investigation of various points being discussed before he took over.

Later in the meeting be sure to turn to him again, for after all you do want the best from him that you can get. Later on you might say to him, "I guess we know how you feel on that last point." He may use this as an excuse to start again, but if

so it will be only a feeble repetition of his first remarks. The social taboo against repeating yourself over and over in public is so strong that his supplementary remarks will be feeble. He will have shot his bolt in his first try. But remember: *this is effective only if you let him shoot his bolt the first time without interruption*, without argument, without any comment or even questions.

It may be that the group will at the end, and after a thorough analysis and testing of alternatives, come out somewhere near his original solution. If so, he will have certain satisfactions, and still the group will have arrived at a group decision. But if you come out far from his solution, he will gradually weaken because of the gravitational pull of the group, provided that you and the other members are steadfast in your determination to get the co-operative thinking of all.

## CHAPTER 11

### STRAIGHT AND CROOKED THINKING IN A DISCUSSION

This is going to be a hard chapter. This one and the next. What I have to say is not of itself so difficult to understand. What is difficult is the application of these ideas in our daily lives and in our conference meetings. Take this chapter slowly. Don't gallop through and say, "Oh, sure, I see what he means." Try to think about each section as you read and try to recall discussions in which these points came up. Then ask yourself: How would I have handled that particular situation? If we had known better could we, as group members, have found a way around this difficulty?

#### APPEAL TO "FACTS"

Whether or not he is actually trying to persuade someone, the group member will make certain appeals in the course of his discussion of a given topic. To explain or bolster his point of view he will call upon: (1) "facts," (2) authority, (3) personal experience, (4) analogy, and (5) logic. Especially is this true if he has been put on the defensive or if he has been asked a number of "why" questions. It is important that you become

aware of these kinds of arguments and be on guard against such pitfalls in your thinking.

Not everything that is called a "fact" may be taken as such without examination. When you hear people say "I know for a fact . . ." you are supposed to take their word for what's said. Again, some people use the expression "in fact" when they mean "in short," and they may use "as a matter of fact" purely as a filler-in phrase between thoughts. You have probably caught yourself using such expressions and may have wondered: Well now, is this a fact?

The generally accepted usage of the word is simply "something that is so." The term *fact* carries the implication that what is "so" can be verified, or demonstrated, or assumed as self-evident. An object, an event or occurrence, or a relationship may be a "fact." In short, almost anything that is "so" is generally considered a fact.

There can be no dispute about anything that can be demonstrated or verified. When in a conference discussion you ask for "the facts of the matter" you are simply inquiring for what can be verified or demonstrated or perhaps assumed as self-evident. Disputes about "the facts of the matter" center about what the group members will accept as "so," about whether or not to accept this or that piece of information as a part of the evidence. It may take a considerable amount of sifting and analyzing before the group can determine from the reports of various members just what did happen in a given situation.

You do not have to go deeply into the philosophy of knowledge—that is, how we know what we know—to realize that there are two sources of our knowledge. The first is what someone has told us and the second is what we have experienced ourselves. Thus, the appeal to "facts" (what we say is "so") can be broken

down into the appeal to authority (what somebody told us) or the appeal to personal experience. And therefore, while it may be a "fact" that such-and-such a worthy person has said that such-and-such is "so," the fact that he said it does not necessarily make it "so." It may still be utter nonsense, verified and demonstrated as nonsense.

One successful discussion leader that I know used to train his groups in what he called "sources of information." He would ask you to quote your source as you made your statement. For example, "In Green's *History of the English People* he states that . . ." or "In this afternoon's *Daily Enquirer* there was an article by So-and-so who said that . . ." or "I was talking with Professor Smith yesterday. He maintained that . . ." This leader's purpose was to avoid disputes about "facts" and to hasten the accumulation of the "facts of the matter" (as wholly acceptable to the group) in order that they might more quickly examine the implications and consequences of those accepted "facts" and reach some decision as to what might be done.

#### AUTHORITY—WHO SAYS SO?

You will agree that it makes some difference who says a thing. Has the person who reports on a given event a reputation for trustworthiness? In our daily lives we all know persons whom we "would not believe on oath." "So-and-so can lie with a straight face. I wouldn't believe him on a stack of Bibles." Also we know of persons who try to report things strictly as they observed them. In my own way of thinking, it is easier for me to credit someone who admits the possibility of error than someone who is overpositive of the truth of what he has observed. Most scientists are careful to report "observations" and to ask others to verify them before they draw conclusions from the



evidence. To question the evidence of careful, thoughtful investigators and observers is quibbling and a waste of time, though one may, perhaps, question the conclusions drawn.

How can we be sure of the accuracy or the probity of our authority? Can we go through life depending upon what the man-down-the-street says? If we look the question up in the library, how can we be sure to pick an author whose observations are unbiased and whose judgments are unwarped? We cannot always be sure but we can tell something from the title of the book we examine. Has the author written other books, and other books on the same subject? This is not a sure guide but it is a help. Has the author a responsible position in a recognized university? This, too, is a help, for most universities try to have men of sound scholarship on their faculties. Is the publisher of the book well known? And is the date of the copyright fairly recent? Can you find out anything about the author from *Who's Who*? The biographical sketches in that book are written by the persons themselves, but they will tell you something of the kinds of jobs the person has held and the kinds of recognition won in various avenues of endeavor. All these points are not sure signs but they will help you judge the possible value of the authority you are consulting.

#### AUTHORITY IN HIS OWN FIELD

One more word about authority. We are too prone to think that a person who has made a reputation in one field is an authority in any field or in all fields. Thus, because a man has made a success in business we are apt to credit his judgments in the field of politics or foreign relations. The truth of the matter may well be that he has concentrated so on business that he has never had time to study other problems and is just

"shooting off his mouth." We are apt to credit our successful military leaders with superiority in all fields of human activity and to trust their judgments in other than military matters.

While it is true that success in almost any line of endeavor seems to demand higher qualifications than the man-down-the-street possesses, success in any line usually means a high degree of concentration in a particular area. In any other area, he may be as uninformed as your neighbor. And your neighbor, by the way, almost never has access to more information than you have. If you are going to be wary of forever taking your neighbor's word for it, you may also look closely at some supposed "authorities" on a given subject.

#### THE LIMITS OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

We have to trust authorities because our own personal experience has been so limited. How many people do you actually know by name in your home town? How many have you spoken to just once or twice and how many have you worked with closely and talked with frequently? Two or three hundred names might cover the entire list. In a town of twenty-five thousand or even of ten thousand that is not a high proportion.

How accurate a map could you draw right now of the main streets in your town, spotting the principal buildings, places of interest, the homes of your friends? Try it some evening, asking your friends to do the same, and then compare the maps that are drawn!

How detailed a list of biographical data (births, schooling, jobs, marriages, deaths) could you compile, just yourself, of the members of your immediate family? How many towns or cities in this country have you actually lived in long enough to know

something about them? How many have you visited or just passed through? These questions are asked not for the purpose of embarrassing you but for the purpose of making you realize how limited is the amount of knowledge each person has gained through his personal experience.

Yet personal experience is real to us. It is true. We trust it. From that experience we have drawn conclusions that guide us in all our thinking and acting. Because a woman with red hair deceived us, we are forever after a little wary of redheads. Because our parents and relatives have nice, warm friendly smiles on their faces when they greet us, we are constantly trying to translate smiles into warm, friendly, belonging feelings. We trust our experience even over a host of authorities. We trust our experience rather than what our teachers tell us is so, what our parents tell us, what the boss tells us.

From our few (comparatively few) firsthand experiences with the real world and its people we draw generalizations or rules of thought and conduct which govern all our ways. We see a person with a black skin who is shabbily dressed and conclude that "niggers are dirty." Someone with a hooked nose tries to drive a bargain with us, and we conclude that "Jews are skinflints." A dainty little girl with brown eyes and dark curls was kind to us in the second grade, and our ideal of charming femininity which persists through later life, is a small slender woman with dark eyes and dark hair. The temperature of Seattle was 85 for the three days we were there, and our conclusion is that Seattle is a hot place. We notice that people in New York seem intent upon their business, and New York is registered in our minds as a cold, unfriendly city. And so on, and so on. With our knowledge limited to our own experience we go through life expecting the worst of people with dark skins, or hooked noses, or red hair, or

those who live in large cities. And expecting the worst, in fact looking for it, we seem to find it.

We bring these conclusions into the conference discussion and argue roundly with anyone whose experience has been different from our own. "Listen, chum, don't tell me. I've been there." Or "You can't tell me about Jews. I've done business with them." The only answer to this problem for the member of a discussion group is a slow, patient re-education through a broadening of experience. And this re-education is assisted by the "conference role" that assumes not I'm-as-good-as-he-is but rather of-course-hc's-as-good-as-I-am. The emphasis upon receptivity in the conference role will gradually wear down the tendency to generalize from personal experience.

#### ARGUING FROM ANALOGY

When we say that something is like something else we are drawing an analogy. The similarity between the two things compared may be striking and may be so close that we actually can draw conclusions about the first idea from an examination of the second. However, the two things being compared will not be identical in all respects, and the person drawing the analogy will usually emphasize the similarities rather than the differences. Those differences are what make the two things *not alike*. The analogy is often introduced with some such phrase as "That's like saying that . . ." If you agree with the person that it is like saying what he compares it to, then he will want you to agree with him as to the conclusions.

Let me give you an illustration from the experience of one of my students. The boss had called together six supervisors to decide whether to send a comparatively new and inexperienced field man on an important mission and, if so, what each of the

six could contribute toward helping him with his difficult assignment. They were mostly agreed, all except George. George was opposed to sending someone with little experience. He said, "You wouldn't ask a bird dog to go hunt bear, would you?" Thus, by using a comparison from the field of sport, comparing the inexperienced field man to a bird dog and the difficult assignment to a bear hunt, George hoped to make the conferees agree with him about the necessity for assigning an experienced person to the task.

For several minutes the sharpness and pointedness of his comparison focused attention upon the new man's lack of experience in the field. To send a pointer trained to flush pheasants or quail out upon the vigorous and bloody business of tracking down and cornering a bear did seem foolish. The group was almost convinced. It soon developed, however, that no experienced person was available for this assignment. The supervisor pointed out, too, that the young man possessed many capacities which experience should bring out and develop. Others in the group added that they could be of help with certain materials and reports which would give the new man some guidance. And so it was decided that he would be sent.

As the meeting broke up George shook his head and remarked, "I still say I wouldn't ask a bird dog to go hunt bear." The boss laughed and wisecracked, "George, you wouldn't ask a bird dog anything, because you'd die of shock when he answered you!"

#### ANALOGIES ARE USEFUL—AND DANGEROUS

Analogies are often useful and helpful. Indeed, much of our knowledge about something totally new comes from comparing it with something we already know. Thus, the poet when he

wants to tell you how beautiful is his ladylove may say "Her cheeks are like roses." And because roses are soft and fragrant and tinged with pink we get a picture of a girl with a beautiful pink complexion. Analogies are in our language, they are in our habitual thought patterns. We use them all the time in trying to explain or describe an object or an event to another person who was not present at the time. To describe someone who was about to faint we say "He went white as a sheet," and because the listener knows how white a sheet is he gets a picture of an unfortunate person whose blood has drained from his facial arteries.

Analogies are best used for descriptive purposes. In an argument they are dangerous. They are a favorite device of the debater in a group meeting. When he says "That's like saying . . ." and then proceeds to draw conclusions solely from his comparison, you are in danger of being swept away from considering the differences as well as the similarities. If, however, you will keep your mind on the *differences* you will be on firm ground. For example, when William Douglas is telling you of Annie Lauric, he wants you to concentrate on how white is her forehead. He sings, "Her brow is like the snowdrift." And, of course, you are charmed. However, if you do not want to be charmed, you will keep your mind on how wet and cold and unpleasant a snowdrift can actually be.

The device is a favorite of the debater—that is, one who would rather win a point against his opponent than search for the whole truth. Thus, when you hear the group embarking upon analogies, you will know that debating or persuading is going on. An effective method of breaking down an analogy is to demonstrate the many *differences* that exist between the two

propositions and the equal value of drawing conclusions *from the differences as well as from the similarities.*

### THE EXCEPTION PROVES THE RULE

If the group member is in an especially combative mood, the pointing out of differences may cause him to maintain that old, familiar battle cry of the hard pressed: "The exception proves the rule." Never use this argument yourself and never allow this statement to go unchallenged. It is false. It is as misleading a statement as ever gained popular credence. Its popularity is due to the rather triumphant effect created in the mind of the user. For those who accept this statement as true there can be no answer, no reply. However, the statement is untrue, for if the exception "proved" the rule (in the sense of *verify*), then there would be no rule. No, the meaning of the word *proves* in that statement is equivalent to *tests*. In this sense, the statement means: "The exception tests the rule"—a true statement. Any rule, to be a true rule, must hold true *without exception*. Thus, one exception will invalidate a true rule. Many of the "rules" that we go by, however, are what may be called "general rules," which means that the rules hold true at least more than half the time. In strict scientific thinking, an exception will "prove" a rule to be false. It is well, therefore, not to let this widespread fallacy persist. Take time—even at the risk of diverting the main theme of the discussion—to root out this popular fallacy. It is another sign of disputation rather than discussion.

### APPEAL TO "LOGIC"

In a discussion, an appeal may be made to "logic." This usually means the drawing of conclusions from the implications of an accepted proposition. "Granted that this is so, then it

follows logically that . . ." The conclusion is contained in the original proposition, by implication.

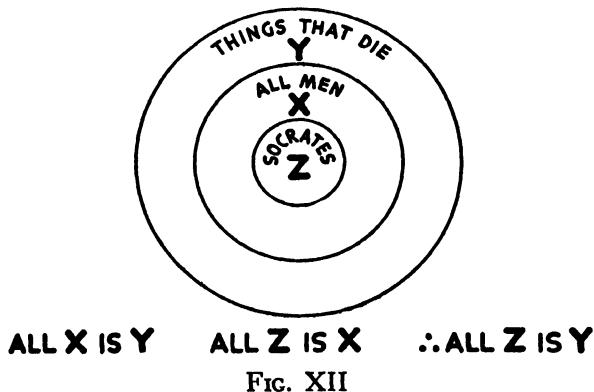
Most logic in a conference discussion is of the pattern known as deductive reasoning<sup>8</sup>: the statement of a general axiom or truth, the statement of a specific case in point, and a conclusion drawn. Thus, to give the classic example without which any reference to "logic" is incomplete:

A. All men are mortal (i.e., will die)

B. Socrates is a man

C. Therefore, Socrates is mortal (i.e., will die).

The testing of whether we have a valid conclusion lies in both A and B. The general statement A must be known to hold true in all cases without exception: every example (every man) which we can say is of this class of examples (*class of man*) has these characteristics (*is mortal*). Likewise the specific statement B must be demonstrated as falling within the scope of the first part of our general statement: this example (*Socrates*) falls within the class (*class of man*). If both A and B can be demonstrated, then C is a "logical" conclusion. The usual way of illustrating this is shown in Fig. XII.





Now, the testing of the conclusion C lies not in the validity of C itself but rather in the validity of A and B. Thus, if any exception to A can be found (the exception tests the rule, remember?), then B might be the exception. And not only B but also B<sub>1</sub> or B<sub>2</sub> or B<sub>3</sub> or any specific example which we are considering. Likewise, B must be shown to be a genuine example of the class of examples considered, for if Socrates can be shown to be not an example of *man* but rather an example of *metal*, then we can draw no "logical" conclusion C from a consideration of A and B.

#### DEDUCTION AND CONFERENCE DISCUSSION

Since this book is not a treatise on logic but rather a guide to co-operative group thinking, we shall not spend too much time on illustrating the many helpful and valid conclusions that can be drawn from subjecting the problem to be studied to this kind of deductive reasoning. You should be aware of certain dangers, however, for these will keep cropping up in your conference discussions. One of the dangers is that the general statements (the A of our syllogism) are derived not from carefully checked and verified sources but rather from our personal experience or that of our friends. Of course, we have to act as though our personal experience was valid or otherwise we could not live at all. But once shown that there are exceptions to your general statement drawn from your personal experience, then to be "logical" you must admit that no valid conclusion can be drawn.

Again, deductive reasoning derives its force from the assumption that something cannot be both itself and something else, it must be one or the other: hot or cold, tall or short, black or white, true or untrue, right or wrong. In other words, either this

or that, and therefore if it is one it cannot possibly be the other. This kind of reasoning takes no account of relativity, or the point from which our observations are made. For how, we ask ourselves, can something be both one thing *and* another at one and the same time?

Proof that one thing may be both *this* and *that* at one and the same time is afforded by another classic example. In Fig. XIII there are represented three pails of water. In the left pail

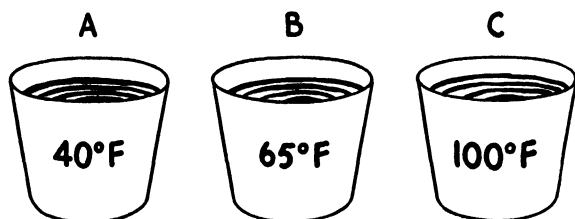


FIG. XIII

the water is at 40 degrees Fahrenheit temperature, while in the right pail the water is at 100 degrees, and in the middle pail at 65 degrees. If you put your left hand in the left pail, the water will feel cold. If you will put your right hand in the right pail, the water will feel warm. Now, if you put both hands in the middle pail, the water there will feel both cool and warm, warm to your left hand and cool to your right hand. In the same way a certain act by an individual viewed from one set of circumstances may appear utterly wrong and shameful, while viewed from an entirely different set of circumstances it may appear wholly justifiable. Examine carefully the phrase "justifiable homicide."

We have to be careful in our use of the *either-or* system of classification, and we can be careful if we remember that

*either-or* is dependent upon the sets of circumstances from which a given subject is considered.

### THE "LOGICAL MIND" AT WORK

In conference discussion you will frequently find persons with "logical" minds who insist that the logic of the situation implies a certain answer to the problem. Such persons may be right, but their arguments are not necessarily valid because they are the first to call upon "logic" to bolster their case. They will frequently try to get you to agree to a certain general principle which may pertain to the problem in hand. Once you have so agreed, they will then show that their deductions are valid and are the only conclusions that can be accepted. As in a discussion of a problem relating to company policy, such persons will often quote precedent or previously established policy and say that the given problem falls within the scope of the previous policy and hence the decision is clear.

Now, as I have just said, these persons may be justified and the group as a whole may agree. What you should do, however, is to consider the problem from the immediate circumstances rather than from a general principle. Do not be swayed by the magic of the word *logic*. Instead, consider whether a given answer to the problem is advisable or inadvisable. Each case may be a separate and distinct problem in which his answer (or yours) may be advisable or not. In this connection you should interpret the word *advisable* to include not only the special circumstances that produced the problem but also the possible consequences of any decision made. Thus, while a particular answer may be "right" and in line with precedent and so on, it may not be advisable considering the probable consequences.

The appeal to "logic," the use of analogy, the appeal to personal experience, the quoting of authority are all fundamentally based upon the process of deductive reasoning and are the favorite devices of the arguer and the debater. The argumentative person and debater is often more concerned to win a point in order to prove himself right than to consider the advisability of a particular decision. Unlike the persuader, who has a certain goal in mind, the debater usually has only his own "rightness" in mind. Whatever decision may be reached, the debater wants you to think him a fine person with a brilliant mind. If you will only let him know that you do think him a brilliant person, he will end up with the group.

These appeals, as I have mentioned above, are often the result of the question "Why do you think so?" This question is a useful device for getting discussion going. When you ask that question, however, you must bear in mind that a person often does not know *why* he thinks as he does. When forced to consider why, he is put on the defensive and seeks to justify his opinions, to prove himself "right" because such-and-such an authority has said so, or because he has been there and seen with his own eyes, or because of the "logic" of the situation. When you see that the discussion is going strong, then you can abandon the question "Why do you think so?" and if the leader or chairman should continue to use that question, you might interpose—tactfully—a different slant. As we shall see in the next chapter, the question "What do you mean?" is far more important than the question "Why or how do you know?"

Let us suppose that Harry has had some "why" questions thrown at him by the chairman or by other members. You may inject a different note by some such phrase as "A moment ago

Harry made the remark that . . . and I would like to have him develop his idea a little further. Harry, did you mean . . . ?” If he has been on the defensive he will be grateful to you for getting him off the hook and allowing him to explain or expound his ideas a little more clearly or more fully. Besides that, the discussion will be further advanced.

## CHAPTER 12

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# HOW NOT TO GET BOGGED DOWN WITH WORDS

### SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE

You have just been studying “crooked” thinking in a discussion, and you have learned that not all such crooked thinking is done by “crooks.” Even the best of us succumb. Though we may be talking from our hearts, and though we may have the best will in the world, and finally though we may do our best to avoid persuasion and faulty logic, still we may have great difficulty in reaching a common understanding in our conference discussion. The conference may bog down because of our language habits.

“Language habits!” you will exclaim. “Aren’t we all taught how to use language in our early school years?” It is true that learning the use of language is a large part of the process of growing up, and it is true that the language we learn, the English language, has certain accepted rules of grammar and of syntax, or word order. English has certain idioms or ways of saying things, and English has certain rhythms. But you will also agree that one may speak correctly and still not be understood. Not only is this true of “highbrow” language full of “five-dollar words” but also is it true of ordinary, everyday speech. You

know that when some people talk (and they are talking English) their meaning is so obscure that it is almost as though they were talking another language. A common expression in our everyday experience is "speaking the same language." You have often heard someone say "I like Joe. He and I speak the same language." And you have understood what was meant.

It will help your conference discussion greatly if you and the members of your group can "speak the same language." The language habits that we have acquired affect our thinking quite as much as our thinking affects the language we use. Our language habits also govern our behavior, sometimes in quite extraordinary ways.

### THE "EMPTY" BARREL

As an example of how our language may govern our behavior, let me tell you a story of an explosion that cost the lives of two men. They were seated with their fellows having lunch in the warm sunshine on the loading platform of a warehouse. Nearby was a stack of "empty" drums or barrels to be loaded on a truck and hauled away. These drums had formerly contained gasoline, but the gasoline had been used, and the drums were "empty." In fact, the phrase used was "empties," and the drums were a stack of "empties" to be hauled away.

How did the men behave toward that stack of "empties?" What would the phrase "a stack of empties" convey to you? Surely it must mean something like this: "containing nothing, nothingness, of little value and hence of no consideration." Toward something that meant *nothingness* and of *no consideration* you would behave as though it did not exist. And that is exactly the way the men behaved. They knew, of course, that it was dangerous to light matches and to smoke around gasoline.

They were careful inside the warehouse in their handling of "full" barrels of gasoline. They knew that gasoline was explosive, and they knew that it was the gasoline vapors that one had to be careful of. Within the warehouse, then, they were exceedingly careful. But surely one might relax one's vigilance outside and at lunch and among a "stack of empties."

You have already guessed what happened. The warm sunshine had vaporized the few drops within the barrels. The "empties" were anything but empty. They were full of a highly explosive mixture of gasoline vapor and air. It was as though these men were laughing and joking and having their lunch beside a pile of TNT. The after-lunch cigarette and the casually tossed match were all that was necessary to complete the chain of events, which resulted in tragedy.

These men knew better. They knew that gasoline vaporized readily and that the vapor burned and that gasoline vapor mixed with air was an explosive mixture. In fact, they were accustomed to seeing series of such explosions—minor explosions under controlled conditions—perform useful work in generating power in engines. They all drove cars. They knew what created the power.

But a "stack of empties" was not associated with power, although the power was there. The "stack of empties" was associated with *nothingness and no consideration*, and they governed their behavior accordingly.

### How HIGH Is UP?

Not all of our language habits kill us, of course. Not all of the mistakes we make because of language and misunderstandings due to language are so destructive as the example given. However, such misunderstandings can disrupt and nullify conference discussion, and it will profit us to examine into some of



our language difficulties and learn how to use language for more effective discussion of problems. One of these difficulties is that of meaningless questions, and this we take up first.

You know that a question implies an answer. You know, too, that some questions cannot be answered, or at any rate not until they are rephrased or broken down into other terms. Such questions we may call "meaningless." Examples come easily to mind. You remember in your childhood what fun it was to ask "How high is up?" and "How wet is water?" And because silly questions seemed to demand some kind of answer, we manufactured the sensible answer "in the dark" to the meaningless question "Where was Moses when the light went out?" And the sensible answer to "Why does a chicken cross the road?"

These examples are easily seen as meaningless questions. But more difficult to see as meaningless are such questions as arise in everyday conversation and discussion. A question which was the subject of a recent discussion: "Will socialized medicine communize the medical profession?" is just as unanswerable and just as meaningless in that form as the other examples cited. What we readily see in the question "How high is up?" is that the words *high* and *up* are relative terms that derive meaning only from the circumstances of a particular instance. The floor of my study as I write these words has a relationship for me of down in my present situation, and when I am in the basement fixing the furnace, that same floor has a relationship of up. In much the same way the words *socialized* and *communize* in the previous question can only be understood from a thorough examination of the circumstances surrounding particular instances.

Not long ago I heard a group member ask "Has democracy failed?" The speaker himself thought he meant something by the question. Evidently so did his hearers, for they nodded or

shook their heads as though they were answering yes or no. In the form in which it was asked the question had no meaning. To derive some meaning from this question, the group had to ask more questions: What do you mean by *democracy*? What do you mean by *failed*? What are the ways to measure results of group behavior and action? What concrete instances could we refer to as *democracy in action*? Does failure to vote constitute a *failure of democracy*? and so on and so on until the key terms were referred to specific events and specific means for measuring.

It became evident in the discussion that even this breakdown was not enough, for a particular instance was viewed as failure by one person and as success by another. To one, a race riot in his town became a failure of the citizens to practice democracy. To another it became a triumph because of the resulting desire of many citizens for a concerted effort to alleviate the conditions leading to the riot. Thus, whether democracy had failed was dependent upon how high was up.

### LET'S BE PRACTICAL

All very well, you say, for questions concerned with words like *democracy* and *socialized* and so on, but in our business conferences we try to deal with practical problems such as "Should an employee be fired for a deliberate infraction of rules?" All right, let's be practical about that question. Which of a given set of rules governing employee actions are so important to the safety and well-being of all employees that violations must be punished by dismissal? Once you have the "important" rules separated from the less important, what are you going to do with that word *deliberate*? Does it imply that the employee knew the rule? Does it imply that the employee had the rule in mind all the time, and after "deliberating" or pondering the situation he

acted contrary to established procedure? Once again, what about that word *employee*? Does it cover everyone from janitor and odd-job man to executive manager and the president?

From the above you will see that it is possible to ask unanswerable and hence meaningless questions about practical problems. To have meaning a question must be answerable. To be answerable a question must, so far as possible, refer to specific events, specific circumstances, particular instances. Such specific references have been called "life facts"—a happy term. To have meaning, then, a question should refer to life facts, despite the fact that our language structure makes it possible to put into the form of real questions groups of words that have no meaning. "How high is Mount Shasta?" has the same form as the question "How high is up?" but only the first has any meaning.

In conference try to confine your discussion to questions that can be answered. If you will do so you will be far along the road to sensible and scientific inquiry. Thus, in conference discussion the question "What do you mean?" is more important than is the question "Why do you think so?" Never mind the why and wherefore; find out first what it is the other fellow is talking about. Make sure if you can that you are both talking about the same thing, the same event, the same circumstances, the same particular instance.

### BILL TODAY AND BILL YESTERDAY

The structure of our language and our language habits make it easy to forget that life is a process. In your conversation you may refer to your friend Bill. Your listener may want to know if you mean Bill Jones. You do. You mean Bill Jones who lives at 323 Highland Avenue. Finally your listener may have one more question. Do you mean Bill Jones Senior or Bill Junior? You mean Bill Senior. That is settled, then, you are both thinking

about the same person, and that is about as far as any of us carries the analysis. While it may be said that the Bill you have in mind is the "same person" as the Bill I have in mind, we must both of us remember that the Bill we knew five years ago is not, literally, the same person as the Bill of today. "Still the same old Bill," we may remark genially when we see him after a five-year interval. He is not the same, however, for we note the crow's-foot wrinkles, the tightened lips, the thinning hair. The passing years have left their impress on his outward appearance if nothing else. The years, too, have left their impress upon his whole self. Bill today is not Bill yesterday. The differences may be slight and hardly noticeable, but the differences are there.

The idea that life is a process does not surprise you, for you have seen it all around you. I hope there is a bowl of apples on the table beside you as you read this. If so, take an apple in your hand. The apple you hold in your hand was, as you know, a seed a few years ago and a flower only a few months ago. And a few months hence, this same apple which tantalizes you with its fragrant odor will become, if not consumed, a shriveled, brown, and stinking watery mess. You realize, too, that you are growing older and that eventually you must die. All life and all living things are a part of this process, from the tiny gnat with a life span of some twenty-four hours to the giant redwoods in California with a life span of a thousand years.

Sometimes the unfolding of this process is so swift that it seems almost as if we could see the changes before our eyes: as in the swift unfolding of pussywillows from tight brown buds on a warm sunny spring day. Sometimes the process is so slow as to seem forever.

Have you ever lost a treasured knife in the yard or garden and come across it perhaps a year or so later? You found it so

rusted as to be almost unrecognizable and certainly unusable. Have you ever visited old Trinity Churchyard at the head of Wall Street in New York? If so, you will have noticed how undecipherable are the legends on the tombstones now. Metal, solid rock, the sands of the beach, the sea itself are all undergoing this process of change. Although we think of them as enduring "forever," and although the process is slow, it is inevitable.

So, too, are human institutions, human ideas, human thoughts in process of change from one form of outward expression to another. It will help you in your conference discussions if you will think of your decisions and the reasons behind them as not enduring "forever." Your decisions (today) may not be the same as your decisions (yesterday), for your experience (today) and your reasons behind your decisions (today) must be based upon circumstances (today) rather than upon the life facts of bygone days.

Do not fret and worry about being consistent. Today's decisions must be based upon the knowledge and experience you have of life as of *the time* when you make the decisions. If more knowledge and greater experience cause you to alter your conclusions next year, or next month, or even tomorrow, do not be afraid to change. If your friends in conference accuse you of being "inconsistent," you may take comfort in the feeling that at least you are trying to be up to date in your views.

#### CLASSES OF OBJECTS

Are you still holding that apple? You haven't eaten it? Good. Look once more at that object in your hand. It may be a pippin, a winesap, a Jonathan, a pound sweet, a Grimes Golden, a russet. The large, firm, round, green pound sweet is quite

different in size and shape and color from the long, pointed Jonathan. And both of these are unlike the small, hard russet apple with its rough, dry, and almost scaly skin. These are but few of the many varieties of objects which we recognize and classify as *apple* though the individual objects bear little resemblance one to another. We know that when we speak of the

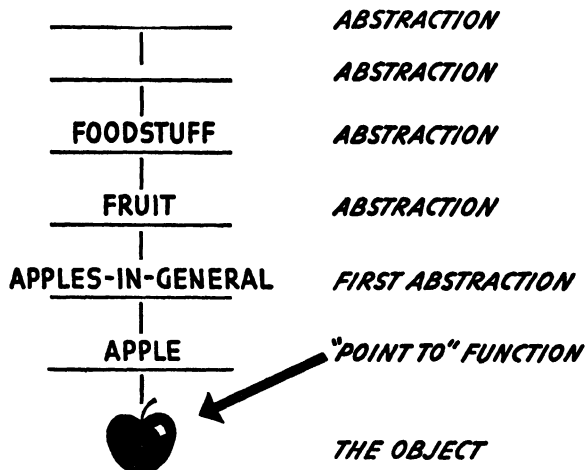


FIG. XIV

class of apple, meaning apples-in-general, we are not referring either to any variety or to any specific object such as the object-apple in your hand.

We can use the word *apple* to refer to or to point to a particular object or we can use it to indicate any object which would fall in the class of *apple*. The class of *apple* can be thought of as coming within still a larger class, the class of *fruit*, and this larger class would include *apple*, *grape*, *peach*, *orange*, and so on. Again, the class of *fruit* can be included in still a higher class, the class of *foodstuff*, which would contain such subclasses as

fruit, meats, cereals, and so on. This step-by-step procedure from the particular object-apple in your hand to the general class, and from that to the even-more-general class is called *abstracting*. And it may help you think of this more clearly if you think of *levels of abstracting*. A glance at Fig. XIV will show this step-by-step abstracting.

### POINT-TO WORDS

The greatest use for the word *apple* is as a *point-to* word, pointing to the object-apple in your hand or on the table or in the basket. We obviously could not get along in the world, we could not deal with reality, without these *point-to* words: Bill, hand, table, rug, house, street, automobile, and so on for the many thousands and thousands of particular items we have to deal with every day. We call such words nouns, or naming words.

You recognize, of course, that the word is *not the object itself* but is simply a means whereby we *point* to the object. That much is clear. Where the mix-up begins is on the levels of abstracting. Even on the lowest levels of abstracting, the nouns that we use to refer to classes of objects have lost their *point-to* function. They would point to so many thousands of individual objects as to be useless as pointers. The word *fruit*, for example, can include so many subclasses and each subclass so many varieties that the word cannot possibly have a *point-to* function. In short, such words are useless as direction finders.

This would be all right except for our habit of using them in exactly the same way as we use our *point-to* words. We use words like *fruit*, *foodstuff*, *economy*, *democracy*, *liberty*, *justice*, *truth* as though they pointed to specific objects or events in the real world. We forget that the original use of such words was

as classification-for-the-purpose-of-dealing-with-classes and talk about democracy, free economy, education, liberty, and so on as though they had a point-to meaning.

Think of yourself for a moment as riding in your car toward a destination. You are not quite sure of the road, and when you come to a crossroads you stop your car to read the signposts. You hope to find one that points the way. But if you find four, each pointing in a different direction, you are confused. Which way democracy? Whither education? Where lies truth or justice? Figure XV illustrates the confusion. Abstractions cannot be used as point-to words.

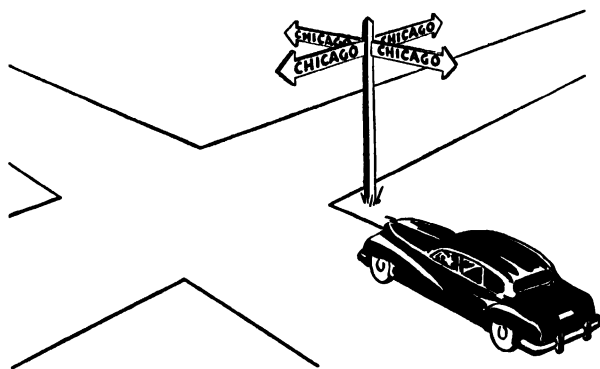


FIG. XV

#### POINT-TO WORDS IN CONFERENCE DISCUSSION

We have taken considerable space to deal with the problem of how words are used because our language habits get us into difficulties that are intensified in conference discussion. At the close of the conference we frequently discover that we have been bandying words, that we have been talking abstractions about abstractions about further abstractions. We have not



*solved the problem.* And because we have not solved the problem we are unhappy and frustrated. The whole meeting has been a great waste of time. More than that, from the unsatisfactory conference we carry over our unhappiness and disgust into the next tasks before us and take out our feelings on our fellow workers.

Are our language habits so firmly set that we can't break them? Are we doomed always to frustration and discontent in conference discussion? My answer to those questions is an emphatic No. We can train ourselves to use *point-to* words for pointing and *classification* words only for classification purposes. The problem to be solved in a conference discussion can be solved only if it is specific and deals with particulars and specifics in the real world. If the problem as stated contains a number of classification words, our first job is to particularize the statement with as many point-to words as possible. We shall deal with this subject in more detail in the next chapter when we study the "ideal" discussion. It is sufficient at this time to remind you that your knowledge and your experience in the real world have been with particular objects and events and you can deal with a real problem only in terms of your knowledge and experience.

### THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

Remember: you cannot deal with particulars in terms of abstractions, for abstractions refer only to other abstractions. Discussions dealing with abstractions go round and round in endless circles. Do you want an example? Here's a dictionary definition of the classification word, the abstraction, called *economy*:

economy—the management or ordering of parts, functions,  
etc., in an organic or organized system  
management = government

government = exercise of administrative powers

administrative = having to do with management.

The first part of our dictionary definition of *economy*, then, has brought us in a complete circle in three short steps. And if we go whirling around in that small circle we can never get to the rest of the definition! Unless it gets down to some specific references and events, a conference discussion wherein the subject of our American economy is introduced is going to start going round and round in dizzying and frustrating circles.

Are you convinced?

#### TAGS AND TAG-NAMES

Reducing the general problem to specifics is not so easy as it looks, and one of the traps that one falls into is the use of tags and tag-names. The walls of this pit are slippery and the descent is easy and swift. Let us say that our problem is that "practical" problem we mentioned earlier: "Should an employee be fired for a deliberate infraction of company rules?" Actually the case in point is the employee, George, who has been reported for a serious violation. You can just hear one of the group talking (it wasn't you, was it?) and he says: "I know George. I wouldn't believe him on oath. He's a liar and a no-good."

Now, these words *liar* and *no-good* sound like strong *point-to* words. The sentence "He is a liar" sounds very like the sentence "This is an apple," and the word *liar* is used as a *point-to* word. But what does it point to? It can point to the verifiable fact that George has told an untruth on occasion—as who has not? It can point to other verifiable instances where George's statements were questionable. Can it point to this particular instance? No. It cannot point *here* until further evidence is

brought forth and George's statements checked against other tangible evidence or the reports of other witnesses.

If you don't happen to like George and are looking for an excuse to get rid of him, then this excuse of rule violation will do as well as any. But if you are trying to decide on the merits of the case, then you will have to go thoroughly into the whole case. In this event, you will avoid tag-names, for they are so easily and glibly applied and the effects are too hard to eradicate. When you think to yourself, "Harry says that George is a liar, and so he's probably lying now," you are not judging the case but *prejudging*.

Tag-names, then, are not only an evidence of prejudging (prejudice) on the part of the user, but also they greatly influence the hearer toward prejudging.

When you go to the airport and present your ticket and your suitcase, the check-in clerk weighs your suitcase and attaches to it a tag. On the tag is noted your destination and the flight number of your ship. The tag is not the suitcase. The tag assists the baggage attendants in sorting out all the various bags and boxes that are to go in this ship. The tag is for classification purposes to the end that you and your suitcase will arrive at your destination on the same ship. The stub of the tag that the clerk gives you is for identification purposes. When you get to your destination and wish to claim your suitcase, the stub in your hand identifies not your suitcase but simply the tag on your suitcase. You have other ways of identifying your suitcase and these other means you would use in case the original tag was lost or torn off. The stub in your hand would not help much.

The purposes of legitimate tags, then, are for classification and not for identification, or *point-to* uses. Tags are useful and

they can help us deal with real problems in the real world. But when tags and tag-names are attached to persons or to institutions they are misleading and prejudicial. "Give a dog a bad name . . ."

### SEMANTICS AND DISCUSSION

The problems of meaningful questions, language habits in our use of words, and the use of tag-names for identification are only a few of the many problems treated in the field of general semantics. Only a few of the problems could be touched on here, although the subject is fascinating. If you attend conferences often and if your duties demand much committee work, much group discussion of policy and practical problems, you would do well to study the methods of general semantics in the alleviation of misunderstandings. Until you have the opportunity to delve more deeply into the subject, it may be enough to put into practice what you have learned in this chapter. The more meaningful you can make your questions the more meaningful will be the answers, both to yourself and to your friends in the conference. Get down to cases as rapidly as possible. Use point-to words in avoiding abstractions. Avoid as much as possible the use of tags and tag-names for persons and for institutions. Your group thinking in a co-operative endeavor to solve a problem will go faster and accomplish more thereby.

## CHAPTER 13

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### THE “IDEAL” GROUP CONFERENCE

#### WHY BE “SCIENTIFIC”?

Have you ever asked yourself why scientific investigation has been so successful at unraveling many of the mysteries of the universe? If you have, you probably came out with an answer that emphasized *method*. One of the reasons for the rapid advance in scientific achievement is that there is a recognizable *method* in a scientific attack on any problem. If that method can prove useful for solving long and complicated problems related to the physical world, you will find it at least worth trying in solving problems in everyday human affairs. We are not sure the method will work. We don't know. Nobody seems to have really tried it and reported back in such a way that ordinary people like us can understand and follow. Let us look into the question and see if it contains anything of value for us.

In the first place, the word *science* means, simply stated, *organized knowledge*. Note that the emphasis is as much on the idea *organized* as it is upon the idea *knowledge*. In other words, no matter how much you may know about a given subject, your knowledge can be called scientific only if it is *organized*. Others working and studying with you in that field should be able to follow your organization and to verify and supplement

and complement what you know. If your information on any subject is scattered, piecemeal, higgledy-piggledy, it certainly is not *organized*. Nobody could verify or "check up on" your information. Indeed, it is doubtful if you could even tell somebody about it so that he could thoroughly understand. The kind of pattern of organization that you use is less important than the fact that you *have a pattern*.

Now, the only reason for using some kind of pattern—some kind of "filing system"—for your information is so that your knowledge may be useful to you (and to other people) not just once but all the time.

### THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD

The method of scientific inquiry also follows a general pattern, a pattern which can be stated as follows:

1. a statement of the problem in such a way that intelligent and answerable questions may be asked about the problem
2. asking questions
3. making observations in the light of the questions that have been asked
4. reporting the observations made
5. revising tentative conclusions concerning the answers to the problem according to the reports received.

And then the whole procedure is repeated: restating the problem, asking questions, making observations, reporting, revising conclusions, and so on and so on. In fact, scientific inquiry is a method which goes on and on and never stops, for as new knowledge comes to light more questions must be raised and revised conclusions drawn.

You may well ask the question: If this goes on and on, don't we ever *know* the answers? Can we ever be sure? Yes, we can be

sure, reasonably sure, provided we have carefully followed the procedure, but we must always be ready to revise our conclusions, ready to change our answers, in the light of new knowledge as it develops. We can be sure, then, so far as our present knowledge goes.

Two brief illustrations will make this clear. A hundred years ago medical science was sure, reasonably sure, that trains should not be allowed to travel faster than 15-20 miles an hour. Medical men were convinced that travel at faster speeds would cause such great changes in the physiology of human beings that they would quickly die. Further information and further observation caused them to revise this tentative conclusion. Now we don't know how fast a human being can travel and still live to tell the tale.

Again, at about the time of our Revolutionary War many mothers were of the opinion that smallpox was a necessary childhood disease as we used to think of measles and whooping cough in our generation. Now we know that smallpox can be successfully prevented, and we know how to do it. The dread disease diphtheria also has yielded to the same method of inquiry and treatment, and measles and whooping cough may rapidly be brought into line.

#### THE METHOD AS APPLIED TO GROUP CONFERENCE

To illustrate that this method of scientific inquiry can be applied to conference procedure I will tell you about a recent occurrence. A company engaged in manufacture and distribution was about to move its plant and offices to a new building. Some of the staff executives were called together into a series of conferences to advise on the problem of the most efficient utilization of the new space. The problem was not whether to

move, for that had already been settled and the new building and the new floor space determined. The problem was how to use the new space to the best advantage. As the problem was stated, it rapidly became apparent to the group that certain questions must be asked; such as, how far from the physical services, such as the elevator and loading platforms, etc., should the manufacturing and shipping departments be located. In the light of such questions the operations of the business were carefully scrutinized and information sought from all departments to determine tentative conclusions and locations for these activities.

The tentative answers to these questions gave rise to certain other questions; such as, with the manufacturing and shipping departments tentatively located, where should the billing and order department be located in relation to the shipping department and the mail-receiving room. Study and observations concerned with this question and tentative answers given necessitated slight readjustments in the previous arrangements for the manufacturing and shipping departments.

Not all these problems stemming from the main problem were solved in one meeting. You will remember that I said this was a series of group conferences. And it should be noted that democratic procedures were followed. Each group member was free to comment, to suggest, to offer information, to ask questions. The result of co-operative thinking on this problem—plus, of course, some expert engineering and architectural advice—was a better plan of allocation than the most expert on the staff could have devised working alone. In general the outline of scientific method just given you was followed: certain questions arose from the statement of the problem, to answer these questions observations were made and information and



reports offered, and on the basis of these reports tentative conclusions were drawn. But these tentative conclusions were shown to give rise to other questions related to the problem, and the answers to these new questions caused some readjustments in the tentative conclusions first reached. And so on and so on until a well-conceived total plan was agreed upon. It was a plan that all the group members—the staff executives—could be happy about because all had participated in all the necessary steps in devising the plan.

#### THE EFFECTS OF DEMOCRATIC PROCEDURE

It was not absolutely necessary that conference procedure be used. An architectural expert might have been called in to work with a staff expert, and the two of them could have produced a plan which would probably have been workable. When the details of the plan had been completed, the staff executives could have been called into a meeting to be told about the details. As I say, this could have been done. Indeed, this is the usual procedure in many companies. And under such procedure in a different company the staff executives—those concerned with the actual workings of the organization—would have had to take the plan and adjust themselves and their departments to it whether they liked it or not.

There was one minor incident to show that scientific method was still at work which you will be interested to know about. Most of the major allocations had been fairly well agreed upon when the problem of housing the technical staff was tackled. A tentative layout had been made for housing a technical staff comprising many fields: mechanical and chemical engineers, civil engineers, agricultural technicians, and even home economists. In studying this tentative layout, one of the consulting

group asked whether it made any difference what the technical staff itself thought about the scheme. Here was a poser. The group were under some pressure to complete the plan quickly in order that construction might be started. But trained as they were in conference method, they realized that at least it *should* make some difference what the technical staff thought they would like. The tentative arrangement was suspended until new information could be obtained on the desires and wishes of the technicians. The final plan took into account the necessary readjustments toward which the new information pointed.

#### THE CONFERENCE STRUCTURE

The "ideal" conference discussion should have a structure, the skeleton of which is apparent to the group members. Has the ideal conference such a structure? I think so, and I think it would be helpful to you to study this pattern. It is a pattern which follows in general the broad outlines of the structure of reflective thinking.

In his book *How We Think* the philosopher John Dewey outlined the broad steps in reflective thinking somewhat as follows: (1) a recognizable problem to be solved; (2) exploration and analysis; (3) listing of possible solutions; (4) experimental testing out of the most likely solution or solutions; (5) acceptance or rejection of that solution.

This is the ideal way to think, of course. Most people do not think this way at all. Some will go through steps 1, 2, and 3 and then leap to acceptance without any study of the possible consequences of the solution hit upon. Step 4 is, perhaps, the most likely to be left out and step 2 the next. Some people even jump from step 1 straight to step 5, immediately from problem to acceptance of a solution—often the first one they

think of. We call them "impulsive." They are always in difficulties. They leap about from problem to solution<sub>1</sub> which does not work, and from problem (same problem) to solution<sub>2</sub>, which does not work, to solution<sub>3</sub>, and so on.

Sometimes inadequate or "impulsive" discussion sounds just like such people. Can good discussion follow the ideal pattern for reflective thinking? Let us see how it might work out.

#### STEP ONE: A PROBLEM RECOGNIZED

In individual thinking there is a recognition that something's wrong. There is, in other words, a problem. Maybe you can't put your finger on it. Maybe you can't quite say in so many words just how big and of what nature the problem is. But the need to attack the problem is there. Some emotional drive is pushing you to "get this thing settled." If you aren't much bothered you won't do much about it and will try to forget the whole thing. If you are greatly bothered by the problem and if it keeps coming up all the time and nagging at your consciousness, then you may turn your whole attention toward a possible solution to rid yourself of the bother. Your drive to do something about it depends largely upon how important it seems to you and how much you are bothered.

In much the same way a conference group may be facing a problem. If it is a real problem, a pressing problem, an urgent problem, then there will be some drive behind the group to "get something done." Perhaps a strike is threatening your company. Perhaps production is lagging, and something must be done about it. Perhaps the management has been grossly unfair to the workers, and they demand consideration. So many children may have been hurt playing in the streets that adequate

play areas are needed immediately. The club's annual meeting is next month and the programs must be sent to the printer. Whatever the problem, if the members of the conference group feel that there is a need to get the thing settled, they are ready to tackle what must be done.

Now, if you find that only you and one or two others in the group feel strongly about the problem, then you aren't going to get much help from the rest. Somehow, you or the chairman or both of you together must put the situation before the whole group in such a way as to motivate their thinking. You must not only arouse their interest but also stimulate their desire to do something about the situation. The situation and some necessary action must seem real and important to them. Their help will be forthcoming when they are convinced somehow that their own welfare and personal interests are involved. Perhaps that is the word, *involved*. What you do is to try to involve them in the problem, for when all are involved there will be an enormous head of steam up that will help carry you through difficulties to a successful conclusion. When all are not involved, there will always be some whose lack of interest will distract the rest of you. Possibly their facetiousness, if any, will seriously hinder a satisfactory approach.

#### STEP TWO: DIAGNOSIS, ORIENTATION, AND ANALYSIS

It may take you and the group only a few minutes to recognize the importance of the problem. You will pass quickly, then, to Step Two. Here the questions that the leader directs toward you, and the questions that you direct toward yourself and toward the others, should lead toward an analytical approach. What are some of the underlying factors? What are

we assuming to be so? Are these assumptions valid? What are the "facts" of the case? How much and just what does each one know? What do we have to know in order to solve the problem? How much of that is already known, and where can we get the balance of our information?

Because many group members will be wishing to jump past this phase and will be suggesting solutions quickly, you and the rest must be alert to easy assumptions, to hasty generalizations, and to unexplored areas. Christopher Columbus was a great adventurer and a daring soul. He was not, however, much of an explorer, for he returned to Spain, so it is said, convinced that the island upon which he had landed was a continent. He had never sailed completely around it to find out!

To understand whether your problem under discussion is an "island" or a part of a larger "continent," you must be willing to take at least a quick sail around it, in this second step of analysis and exploration. Exploration is an adventure and can be fun, but it is also hard work—if your explorations are to count for much in the way of sensible solutions. Remember: the knowledge and the experience of all the group members can contribute toward this exploration.

#### WHERE CONFERENCES GO ASTRAY

Here is where many conferences first go astray. Here is where many misunderstandings and difficulties arise. Various reports will be contradictory. So-and-so's "facts" will, under questioning, turn out to be assumptions. There seem to be so many "angles" that you may not know which to tackle first. The problem may bulk so large as to seem far beyond the capacities of the group or may appear so complex as to seem almost hopeless for disentangling. But do not despair. For the time

being try to cut the problem down to size. If it's too big a mouthful, chop it up to bite size that you can chew on. At this meeting, then, you will consider only thus-and-so, although you recognize that it is only a part of a larger whole.

When you have the problem down to bite size—and there must be considerable agreement among the group as to which part is most important at this time—then try to determine whether you need expert assistance. If so, what kind of assistance and from where obtained. If you and the group feel that you can tackle it without going outside the group itself, then calling in an outsider becomes an unnecessary delay. Watch here for the persuader, for he may insist that you ought to get Mr. X's "expert opinion." Watch here for the "delaying" tactics of those whose purpose is *not* to arrive at a solution. Watch here also for the "sounding-off" tattoo of those who have to blow their own horns.

Finally, when you have the problem in wieldy proportions, you still must decide the "angle" or the orientation of your approach. Are you, for example, going to approach the problem of new quarters for the technicians from the point of view of *their* desires and wishes in the matter? If you are going to use that angle, then the discussion will be different from what it might be otherwise.

Step Two is far from a waste of time. On the contrary, it may be, and if well carried out actually is, a great saving of time. Until your problem has been explored and analyzed and until your group has reached some agreement on this and upon the orientation of their thinking, any solutions offered will have no foundation. Any time you spend discussing meaningless solutions is a silly waste.

### STEP THREE: SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

The hard part of your thinking as a group is done. Do you believe it? It is true, for once the problem is clearly and meaningfully stated in terms that you can understand, the answers to the questions asked seem to flow in a rapid stream of creative suggestions. This part of the conference is fun. This is the creative part. Now you are beginning to "get somewhere."

To assure yourself that you are not overlooking a bet as to possible solutions offered, you should at this stage of the conference make a kind of game of thinking up all the answers possible in as short a time as possible. Let your mind go. *Remember: no criticism of any ideas offered.* Get as many ideas out into the open as possible. The more the merrier, however nonsensical and screwball they may sound. The critical analysis and testing of the value of the ideas comes later. Concentrate now, in rapid-fire fashion, upon getting down as many as possible. Have one of the group record these ideas as fast as they are mentioned.

You will begin to run out of ideas after a while, and as the recorder reads them back, you will see that they tend to group themselves around certain central themes. Now, after the fun is over, you can settle down to the critical task of testing out the values of these suggestions in Step Four.

### STEP FOUR: CRITICAL TESTING OF MOST LIKELY SOLUTION

You will recall that I said that Step Four is what many people leave out of their personal thinking. Many conferences leave this out, too, or in many conferences this part is so mixed in with Step Three as to stifle the creative flow of ideas. Step Four is the place for careful scrutiny of the values and the

possible consequences of selecting any of the solutions suggested. Here is where you say "Well, I think that this idea won't work because we could expect such-and-such to happen." Here is where you say "If we undertook to do this in answer to our problem, could we reasonably expect thus-and-so to follow?" Here is where you say "That one sounds to me like a swell idea. I think we might get the following favorable results . . ."

Here you are applying "scientific" method in the testing of your hypothesis. It is the "proving" of an algebraic problem by the substitution of numbers for letters. It is a kind of thinking through to possible conclusions. Here the quick, easy solution, the glib suggestion, may be seen for what it is worth. Here the possible consequences, as studied from your special "angle," your previous orientation, may show up a particular conclusion to be almost inevitable.

#### STEP FIVE: ACCEPTANCE OR REJECTION OF SOLUTION

In individual study and problem solving, the final step is the acceptance or rejection of a particular solution. It is the conclusion of your efforts on this particular problem. Your conclusion may be, of course, either a profound conviction governing all your actions or may be tentative and dependent upon further information as developed by further study. But in conference discussion Step Five is not complete until the conclusions reached have been accompanied by a *plan of action and the assignment of responsibilities for action*. This point we will study further in the next chapter.

When your group has reached the point where you say "We are agreed. Let's try this out and see what happens"—at that time your group is just emerging from Step Four, the critical testing of conclusions. Many times it happens that no further report



back to the group is made; that is, the members are not kept fully informed as to what does happen following the agreement to try a given course. And this makes for some feeling of inconclusiveness, for they may never know whether the decisions worked out well or not. The setting of a time limit for reporting back often serves to carry over the interest of the members and affords them considerable feeling of satisfaction in accomplishment.

### IDEALS NOT ALWAYS ATTAINED

It has been said that man's reach should exceed his grasp, and certainly you will find that no particular conference follows this "ideal" pattern exactly. The pattern, for all that it may not be followed strictly, is a good pattern. If you and the other members of your group will try to follow it in the shaping of your discussion, you are almost sure to find better results than if you fashion your thinking piecemeal, haphazard, catch-as-catch-can.

The boundary lines between the various steps or stages are not rigidly defined. They merge and blend, and your group will pass from one to another—and perhaps back and forth—without conscious realization of the exact process. What you say in one stage is different from what you say in the next, and the whole character of the discussion changes. Not only what you say and why you say it, but also the tempo and rhythm. The pace in Step One is rapid-fire and the character of the comments emotional. You are here making an appeal. In Step Two, the pace is deliberate, careful, considerate, painstaking. Step Three again becomes rapid-fire, for the creative attitude and spirit are stimulated by quick, punchy, pithy suggestions. Even the screwball notions will sometimes set off a

train of mental explosions which may eventually clear the way toward the happy solution sought. The rapidity and excitement of Step Three will often carry over into Step Four, but here the pace slows down again, for here once more deliberation and careful consideration play a part. The tendency in Step Five is again to speed up. You and your group recognize that you are not far from the goal. You are beginning to feel the satisfactions of accomplishment. Take care that the assignments of executive responsibility are made with proper deliberation.

As I just said, few conference discussions follow this pattern closely. It will help you, however, if you will try to use this pattern not only in your private thinking and study but also in your co-operative thinking with others. Your knowledge and understanding of the pattern will help you focus your thinking, for you will know not only what you are trying to accomplish but also why. And how it may be achieved.

## CHAPTER 14

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### GETTING SOMETHING DONE

#### TALK THAT GETS NOWHERE

The main criticism of conference discussion by the proponents of an action program is that discussion “gets nowhere.” “Let the boss decide,” they seem to say, “so that at least we can get something done!” Now, if it is true that the discussion in a meeting gets nowhere, then it may be that the situation that was to have been bettered is in truth actually worsened. The conference may wind up with the members more muddled than before.

To keep this from happening to you, you have been practicing to become a good group member and you have studied the behavior of people in groups and begun to put into practice what you have learned. And finally, in this Part III you have studied ways of thinking co-operatively with your fellows. You have learned some of the ways to think straight by examining how one’s thinking may become snarled. You have learned to practice asking meaningful questions and to avoid some of the language habits that prevent one from getting down to cases. You have studied the “ideal” conference as a model by which one may measure progress. Part III would be incomplete without the inclusion of a chapter on how to reach decisions co-

operatively—for the purpose of many group meetings is, after all, to reach a group decision.

What we have to tackle now is how to make discussion “get somewhere.” You and the other members of the group have a responsibility to help make the discussion effective, for no matter whether the chairman or discussion leader is inspired and dynamic or listless and wobbly, it is still your conference as much as his. You have a stake in the success of the conference and the effectiveness of the discussion. Then, too, you personally do not wish to become frustrated and unhappy by taking part in a waste-of-time activity.

One of the first questions you will wish to ask yourself about the next conference discussion you attend is this: For this meeting to get somewhere we have to have a somewhere to get to, and so what is our goal? Even if the chairman is ineffectual in helping the group determine its goal, you and the other members can and must do this for yourselves. *Keep the goal clearly in mind during the meeting.* If the goal can be reached in one meeting, well and good. You and your friends in the group may discover, however, that the goal is more distant than you thought at first and more meetings are called for. Nevertheless, *keep the goal clearly in mind, for any recognizable progress toward the goal constitutes satisfaction rather than frustration.*

#### DECISION AS A GOAL

Throughout this book I have emphasized a problem as the subject matter of a conference discussion. The purpose of a conference meeting need not necessarily be the solution of a problem. The goal may be simply the interchange of experience, as in a company meeting to listen to reports from field per-

sonnel. Again, the purpose may be to exchange opinions with a view toward sharpening the issues in a forthcoming meeting. For the most part, however, group discussion is more effective if approached from the problem-solving side. If, then, the subject of the discussion in your meeting is cast in the form of a problem, the purpose or goal is *decision*. It is more than this, of course, for the decision must be *group decision with group acceptance*.

So long as decision is postponed by anyone and for whatever reason, then just so long will the group members be in a state of tension and irresolution in their own minds and among themselves. If the problem is urgent and if the pressure for speed is great, these tensions and conflicts will be magnified. The greater the urgency for solution the greater the tensions generated. With the resolution and with the group acceptance of group decision comes release from tensions and the accompanying feeling of satisfaction at reaching the goal. When decision has been reached, it is time for action. The need for talk has vanished, swiftly and almost mysteriously, and the need for action has arisen to take its place. Decisions, therefore, are incomplete without the delegation of authority for action or at least the outlines for a plan of action.

### A BARRIER TO DECISION

What is it that seems most likely to keep the group from reaching a decision? The most effective barrier is not a *what* but a *who*, not a thing but a person. That person is the man or woman in the meeting who talks too much. He may realize that his talk is postponing decision and hence postponing action, and indeed this may be his purpose—a delaying action. More frequently, at least in my experience, the talkative person

seems completely unaware that he is not really contributing. More frequently he thinks he is helping. He wants to make sure that all the side issues are mentioned, that the group has not overlooked important questions, for sometimes you can't tell when you first look at a question just which is important because he remembers his father telling him that in the old days they did things differently and just because they did things differently then it doesn't mean necessarily that they did things wrong, and as a case in point . . . and so on and so on and so on.

Will he ever run down?

What's he like, that talkative person, who rambles on and on and on? We have already dealt with the self-assertive and aggressive person in Chapter 9 and the persuader in Chapter 10. The talkative person is different. Psychologists tell us that ordinarily the talk-talkative person labors under a heavy burden of anxiety or fear. The fear fundamentally is about himself and his own inadequacies. The adequate person is content to be himself and to take others at their face value. The inadequate person tries to cover up by talk. His deficiencies, often only imagined, are covered up because he is impressing you, or trying to, with his knowledge and his ability and his experience. He brings in his famous relatives or refers to other well-known persons with the subconscious hope that because these people were highly thought of he will be, too. He talks to reassure himself, to be certain that he is liked and accepted by the group. Curiously, that much-needed reassurance dwindles rather than increases as he talks and so he must talk further. When he finally does run down he is often covered with remorse and confusion because he knows in his heart that he has made a bad impression.

### "FREEZING OUT" THE TALKATIVE PERSON

What are you going to do with such a person? It is a problem that comes up in perhaps as many as three group meetings out of four. It is a problem that my students and I have talked about many times and at length. Their solutions as given in various classes and at various times go something like the following:

First of all, the group members must determine in their own hearts whether they want this person in the group or not. If he seems a hopeless case and if the group does not want him because they can accomplish little so long as he is there, then they may get rid of him. How? Ordinarily by "freezing" him out. By maintaining a stony silence as he talks, by refusing to comment on or to question any of his remarks, by greeting him with a cool, aloof politeness at the opening of the session, in brief by treating him almost as though he were not present. In one of these ways or a combination of them the group makes him so uncomfortable that he soon ceases to attend meetings. Only the most thick skinned of individuals can survive this "freezing" process. Your talkative person is thin skinned and will soon be seeking some other group where he is "appreciated."

I must confess that this solution has always sounded a little heartless to me, for I hate to think that any person is beyond saving. I do recognize, though, that the job of unburdening this talkative soul of his heavy pack of fears and anxieties is long and arduous and to be undertaken only by one competent in psychology and psychiatry. Certainly the group cannot undertake this regenerative process. What can the group do, then, but relieve itself of him who is a burden?

## A LESS DRASTIC METHOD

Suppose, however, that the group is more kindly disposed. Instead of wanting to freeze him out, they are willing for him to remain so long as he does not actually impede progress too much. In this case, many students decided, they would try to "kid" him and good-naturedly interrupt him with expressions such as: "Johnny, you've been around here a long time and you know we're all for you. Let's give some of the other fellows a chance to speak their piece." Or: "Mabel, I've noticed that Doris hasn't opened her mouth all afternoon. I wonder what ideas Doris might have." Or again: "Johnny, you seemed to have a suggestion in your mind when you started. Could you sum it all up in a single question?"

In reporting back on their experience with trying to handle this kind of difficult person in this way, my students reported success. And this verifies my own experience. I believe that you, too, will be successful if you will try this method, perhaps not unqualifiedly successful the first few attempts but enough so to warrant your continued efforts. What you will discover is that it is better for one or two of the group members to take this duty upon themselves than to wait for the chairman or group leader to apply a gag to the talkative person. What my students discovered, somewhat to their surprise and greatly to their delight, was that talkative Johnny or chatterbox Mabel would take in a friendly fashion a rebuke that was offered by a *friend in a friendly way*. Johnny was put in his place, and Mabel in hers, but his place was still *in the group*, which allayed the subconscious fear that had been bothering him. The chairman can do this, too, but when the chairman interrupts to hush



Mabel so that Doris may talk, Mabel is still not sure in her mind that she is liked and accepted. If someone in the group can do the job, the chances are that it will work out better. Bear in mind that the whole purpose of this technique is to keep Johnny or Mabel in the group. This means, then, that the job of hushing the talkative person must be done not by a group member who is habitually critical and unfriendly but by someone who likes Johnny or Mabel. After all, there is no reason why a group member who recognizes this difficulty and can do something about it should not assume the responsibility without waiting for the chairman to act.

#### THE GROUP FALLS APART

The hurdle of the talkative person has been cleared, and the group is well into the discussion with each member contributing freely his comments and questions. There develops a point or perhaps two or three upon which there seems to be no agreement whatsoever. Let us say that you are in Step Four of the "ideal" conference, the testing of the solutions offered to determine which to try first. Here the discussion bogs down. Everything may have been going well up to this point, but suddenly the group seems to be in danger of splitting apart. It is easy to sense this, for one of the manifestations is that the members will turn to one another and begin talking in twos and threes. Among these smaller units the individuals are seeking agreement and corroboration and endorsement of particular views previously expressed.

A little of this "falling apart" of the group is inevitable, and perhaps it is even necessary from time to time as relief from the centripetal pull toward agreement. It may even be thought of as a kind of rest period. However, right at this "falling

apart" point is where so many conferences close either because the allotted time has run out or because the members are reluctant (unknowingly so) to struggle on toward decision. Right here is where so many meetings do literally fall apart and come to an inconclusive end with the "agreement to disagree."

To reach a decision, it is important that you *do not agree to disagree*. If you do, you kill your chances for decision at this meeting. The phrase expresses an attitude which implies that the case is hopeless. If you have no hope you have no incentive toward further effort toward your goal. Always try to combat this attitude among your colleagues in the group. If you hear someone use that phrase or something like it, cut in *quickly* with a comment expressing: "I think we aren't so far from agreement as it might appear. There are many points on which we see eye to eye. Let's go back a bit . . ."

The point is, always assume that you are going to agree on *something in the end* and act accordingly.

#### FROM AGREEMENT TO AGREEMENT

If the case seems hopeless at the moment, suggest to the chairman that you take a ten-minute recess. He may have already thought of it, but if he hasn't, you take the initiative. After the recess start in again with a brief review of those points upon which *agreement has been reached*.

With agreement firmly fixed on these points—even two or three are enough—then proceed to tackle one by one the ideas that seem to cause the trouble. If the leader does not help much, again you take the initiative because you want *this conference to succeed*. Take the first point of controversy. If you can remember who mentioned the idea first, ask him to restate his

point. Use a phrase like this: "I'm not just sure, Jack, that I understood your remarks about such-and-such. Would you mind stating those ideas again?" Jack probably won't mind, and unless he has memorized his previous speech he will greatly change the wording in his restatement. This change in wording and phrasing is important because with each new statement of the idea new shades of meaning creep in, and new overtones. Some who had at first objected will begin to nod their heads as if to say "That's reasonable, after all."

By encouraging Jack and those who now are nodding their heads in agreement to continue this rephrasing process, you will find that more and more members are edging toward what seems "reasonable." Frequently you will discover that the original statement of the idea contained only a phrase or even a word that was objectionable. When that phrase is left out or reworded in a subsequent statement, the objections may vanish completely. I have seen this happen time after time, and when my students began to look for it, too, they reported instance after instance.

One of them said, "Just yesterday in a supervisors' meeting, the really difficult member remarked that it was the word *must* in the original idea that stuck in his craw. With that implication out, then he had no hesitation in going along. And the *must* had only been thrown in casually anyhow!"

Another reported: "Have you noticed, too, how a single word or phrase mentioned early in the discussion will sometimes capture everybody's mind? The other day, we were planning a program for our annual meeting and a lot of ideas were being tossed about. One of the members said he regretted his lost youth. Another immediately suggested a back-to-youth party, but the phrase that really caught on was Back-Our-Youth. As

this idea began to grow, you could see more and more enthusiasm. It was even suggested as a slogan and theme for our fall series next year."

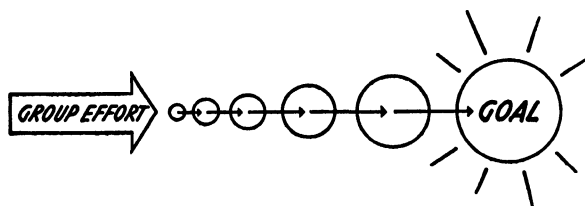
#### PHRASE THE IDEA POSITIVELY

The technique suggested may not always work. There is no sure-fire formula for success in human relations. If the suggestion does not work for your group, then after several attempts at rephrasing you might ask the objector to phrase the idea as he thinks it should be stated. *Do not ask him what his objection is.* To do this first will strengthen his argumentativeness. Simply ask him how he would state the idea positively. If he is thinking positively, he may come up with a restatement which everyone will like. If, on the other hand, he is dead set against the whole idea and so cannot or will not state it positively, then you may ask him what his objection is. This gives you or Jack or anyone else a chance to try your hand at restating the thing positively in such a way as to incorporate the objector's views.

The minute agreement is reached upon the point at issue, pass quickly to the next issue where opinion diverged and again suggest restatements. The net effect of such procedure is that you and the group will be passing from agreement to agreement. This almost inevitably tends to set up a "yes" response and an atmosphere favorable to ultimate decision on the central problem. You will find that solving the first issue assists in the second. Agreement upon these two in turn will make those remaining seem comparatively insignificant. This is so because most of the major controversial issues will have been mentioned early in the discussion, and settling these first will give the whole group a new perspective on the problem.

## DON'T FILL YOUR ICEBOX

If you can find no agreement on, say, point number two, it may be advisable to put it "on ice" temporarily. Note that this is not the same as "agreement to disagree" but rather an agreement to postpone seeking agreement on that particular issue. Pass to the next. If this one can be solved by restating and rephrasing, then pass to the next and the next. Soon all that will be left will be the one "on ice," and you will be surprised to discover that with a "yes" response and favorable atmosphere the ice has melted considerably. The task of reaching agreement



**FROM AGREEMENT TO AGREEMENT = PROGRESS**

FIG. XVI

will not seem nearly so great. But don't try filling up your icebox! One at a time is about all that that method can stand.

If decisions are the goal, your objective is reached by passing from *agreement to agreement*. (See Fig. XVI.)

I know that you are thinking that I have made it sound too easy. You are thinking that if it was as easy as that, then fewer conferences would end in futility. I don't want to minimize the difficulties, and certainly I can say from experience that mules are no more stubborn than human beings. But this I will say: I have never seen the method fail when it has been genuinely tried.

Of course, you have to be a little subtle about the method. Too naïve an approach will not always work. Use skill in your own phrasing of your questions. Without trying to put words in another person's mouth and without implying that he meant more than he said, you may rephrase and restate the controversial idea. Use an expression something like this: "I may have missed the point but as I get it we could put it this way . . ." He will probably come back at you with still another restatement with slight modifications or clarifications.

### THE COMMON POOL OF IDEAS

Please note the use of the word *we* in the quotation above. Always emphasize the *we-us-ours* and never the *I-my-me* or the *you-yours*. We have a problem to solve. We are seeking to reach decisions and pooling our best knowledge and experience. What holds us back are differences of opinion and judgment.

If we had no such differences, we would all be automatons. But for the purposes of this conference, we are combining *our* best opinions and our best judgments to reach decision.

That *he-his-him* across the table must be made a part of *we-us-ours* if our decisions and course of action are to be effective for all of us.

Translating this orientation, this approach, this attitude into techniques means that so far as possible you will actually speak of the various ideas and suggestions as *ours*. For example, "Our idea, then, is to . . ." or "The suggestion offered means that we should do . . ." or "The criticism raised will modify our plan to include . . ." and so on. In this way, the group is not rejecting *Jim's* idea, or using *Annabelle's* but rather utilizing from the common pool *this* suggestion and leaving, perhaps only temporarily, that suggestion for another time.

## IDEAS AS PUBLIC PROPERTY

Thus, your approach to any idea put before the group is that the proposition is *ours*, and not my idea or yours or his. Any definition or suggestion or solution or criticism offered by any group member immediately becomes “public property,” so to speak. (See Chapter 9.) It belongs to the group and becomes a part of the total group experience. Remember: not all of this experience (including knowledge and opinion) will be used for the purposes of making decisions at this meeting. What is not used is not necessarily cast aside as worthless. What is not used is simply put aside as unessential for the particular purposes of this particular meeting.

“I am a part of all that I have met” wrote the poet Tennyson, and likewise all that I have met becomes a part of me. I cannot take back from you, nor can anyone, the effect of my thoughts and my actions upon others in a group meeting. Nor can you ever wipe out the impact of your thoughts as you express them openly. Thus, even though your pet idea or your favorite project has not been wholly accepted as integral to the final decisions of the group—our decisions—nevertheless, the effects of what you may have said are indelibly there.

## BUILDING TOGETHER

Let me call to your mind an analogy (although analogies are dangerous). Think for a moment of a group meeting as though the final purposes were to build a building co-operatively. Each of us at that meeting brings to the project lumber and nails, bricks and mortar, fittings and hardware from our private storehouses of knowledge and experience. What one sees of the finished structure from the outside covers the more important

plates and studs and joists under the surface. Furthermore, not every brick, not every square foot of lumber will enter into the finished product. In order to be sure we have enough, we must always have some left over.

Building with ideas to form the structure of our decisions is different from building with concrete materials like bricks and lumber. Ideas are never wholly consumed and used up. Ideas may be used over and over again and combined in infinite variety to suit the infinite number of purposes demanded of us. And so we bring to every conference discussion our whole selves, far more material, it may be, in knowledge, experience, and ideas than is necessary from a strictly utilitarian viewpoint to fashion the structure of our decisions at this meeting. *What is not used is still there. What has been used may be utilized over and over again.*

The stone which the builders rejected . . .  
[at some previous meeting for other structures]  
the same has become . . .  
[at a subsequent time]  
the cornerstone of the temple!





## PART IV

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# When You Have to Lead the Discussion



## CHAPTER 15

### SOME PRINCIPLES OF LEADERSHIP

#### THE BEST GROUP MEMBER

This section of the book will necessarily be short. You have studied the many factors that go into the job of being an active and intelligent and percipient group member. If you have been putting into practice the various points you have learned you have been greatly increasing your power in dealing with people. You have begun to learn your own ways of handling various situations that inevitably arise. With the increase in your power and ability has come a greater sense of responsibility for the success of the conferences you have taken part in. Perhaps you have even been able to infuse other people with this feeling of responsibility for outcomes, for you have realized how much a group of responsible individuals can accomplish whether the leader is skillful or not. Contrary-wise, the most skillful leader is at a loss with a group of irresponsible members. What I am trying to say is that *success in conference discussion is more dependent upon the group than upon the leader*. The responsibilities of the leader are different from those of the group members, but first of all the leader must know how to be a good group member before his leadership is effective. The leader

must, in short, be the best group member. Beyond that he has certain other duties which we will study briefly in this chapter.

### GET ACQUAINTED—FAST

First of all, become acquainted with the members of your group. Make sure that you know each member by name. If you are dealing with your coworkers, this is not a problem, but if the group is new to you, remember that you also are new to them. If you can possibly do so, make a point of being on hand early so that you can introduce yourself to the various individuals as they arrive for the meeting. Get into conversation with those who come early. This conversation will often give you some insight into individual peculiarities and points of view toward the subject under discussion. The group member who is inclined to be dogmatic or pontifical on the subject in his casual conversation with you will also be that way in the meeting.

Make sure, too, that the members are introduced to one another as they arrive. This will not always be possible, for as the time for the meeting approaches the members may be arriving in a bunch. But if there are some bewildered souls who appear not quite sure that they are in the right place, be sure to greet them personally. That will help put them at ease and to foster the feeling of "belonging." Think of yourself somewhat as host, a host who is greeting his guests and his friends. The establishment of a friendly, "belonging" atmosphere begins before the meeting.

### INTRODUCING YOURSELF AND OTHERS

It may not always be possible to greet each person individually before you begin your meeting. Further, it may not always be possible to introduce members to one another. In this case,

take the first minutes of the meeting for introductions. Introduce yourself first and then proceeding around the conference table ask each member to introduce himself giving not only his name but also something of his background. His background would include his business affiliation, his position with the company, his connection with the meeting, and what he hopes to get out of the conference. If the names of the conferees are known beforehand, place cards with names and affiliations in large letters are a great help in the matter of introductions. Place cards, however, are not a substitute for spoken introductions. Even with place cards, you should afford each person the opportunity to say what he would like to have said about himself.

Caution: The group will follow your lead. If you remain seated when you introduce yourself, so will they. If you rise, they will. If you are too modest and mumbling in giving your name and your interest in the meeting, they also will be. Right here is where you begin to set the tone of the meeting.

The time spent in these introductions (where the group members are not all well acquainted) is time well spent. It is necessary time. Be sure to allow for it in your plan of the meeting. Allow as much time as necessary to go completely around the table without slighting or overlooking anyone. After this has been done, then you may present the topic.

#### FIRST NAMES OR LAST NAMES?

The group, too, will follow your lead in the use of first names. If this is an informal meeting and you wish to become one of the gang as quickly as possible, then use your first name and your nickname when introducing yourself. For example, "My name is James Smith and I work for the XYZ company as personnel director. The fellows don't call me Jim, as you might

think, but instead they call me Smitty. That's the name I like. If I hear the name 'Mr. Smith' I'm likely to look around vaguely and say 'Who, me?' But if you'll just call me Smitty we'll get along fine."

Not every conference calls for that degree of easy familiarity. But remember: if you are "high hat" and stuffy in introducing yourself, the rest will likely be stuffy and uncompromising too. There is no good reason, I suppose, why you should not be called Doctor Smith if you have a professional degree and are accustomed to being so addressed. Your own use of the title, however, is going to frighten off people rather than warm them toward you. Why not try something like this: "My name is James Smith, a rather common name and for that I am glad for my people were just folks. I am a physician and spend much of my time in the clinic at St. Luke's Hospital. Those who come to the clinic have got into the habit of calling me Doctor Jim. I guess I'd answer if you called me Dr. Smith or just plain 'doc,' but if you want to call me 'Doctor Jim,' I'd take it as a friendly gesture on your part."

### TREAT EVERYBODY ALIKE

First names or last names, it does not much matter. Which you use depends upon the character of the group and the general tone you wish to establish. What does matter, though, is that you be consistent. Don't use first names for some of the group and last names of others and "Mister" for still others. Treat all group members alike.

The reason for this is easy to see. If you use first names for some but not for all, you create an "in" group and an "out" group almost at once. You create an "us" and a "they." After a while that division is sure to come back and plague you. Your

object should be to foster a feeling of "us" among *all* the members. Therefore, be consistent throughout. Remember: it is possible to be friendly and informal and still use "Mister" and "Miss" in addressing the members. It is also possible to be respectful and cognizant of another's abilities though you call him Jim. The friendliness and informality must be genuine, and the use of first names is usually considered a help. But beware lest the quick and easy assumption of first names mask a spurious friendliness. This can be as deadly as a chilling formality.

### THE RULES OF THE GAME

Your responsibility as leader requires of you a further duty—that of enforcing the rules of the game. It may help you to think of these rules as almost the complete opposite of "Roberts Rules of Order," or the rules for parliamentary procedure and procedure in formal and official committees.

Parliamentary rules of order are useful for conducting large meetings where official business must be done. They are generally recognized everywhere. Although they do not serve to prevent disagreement and conflict, they do serve to indicate what may be done to continue the meeting despite disagreement. Some of the most useful rules have to do with handling unpleasant and recurring ideas ("tabling the motion") and for dealing with an individual who is a nuisance and interrupts the progress of the meeting. Whatever is "out of order" may not be discussed, and whoever is "out of order" may be suppressed or even ejected from the room. Although there are also rules for appealing from his decisions, in general the chairman is in complete charge of the meeting, and his rulings on points of order are final. No one may speak without his explicit or implied consent. The meeting ends when he declares it adjourned.



Useful as these rules are for formal meetings, they have no place in a conference discussion. This is because parliamentary rules were devised for quite a different purpose from the usual purposes served by informal discussion. The leader who follows such rules in a conference discussion will soon stifle the free flow of thought. The group member who insists upon following parliamentary rules may not understand discussion principles. Or he may be showing off how much he knows. Again, he may be trying deliberately to sidetrack the meeting. In any case, as leader you must quickly make clear that for this conference meeting parliamentary rules are themselves "out of order."

#### CONFERENCE RULES OF ORDER

But there must be some rules. All is not chaos nor left to chance. The rules can be briefly stated and should be impartially enforced. Further, you must enforce them more rigidly upon yourself than upon the group members. Six guiding principles are enough to constitute the "rules of order" for a conference discussion. They are as follows:

**RULE ONE.** *All decisions are based upon the consensus of the group.*

**RULE TWO.** *The leader has no "pet" idea to put over. This rule does not prohibit the leader from joining the discussion and saying what he thinks, but it does prohibit him from using persuasion and the influence of his position to force the group to accept his conclusions.*

**RULE THREE.** *All group members are expected to participate freely and voluntarily. This means that one does not have to be "recognized" by the chairman in order to speak. In case two or more members start talking at the same time, one will usually give way, as in ordinary, polite conversation. But if neither gives way, the leader will have to rule in favor of one or the other.*

- RULE FOUR.** *Talk one at a time—no “private conversations” on the side.* This rule is closely tied in with number three. Obviously, if everyone is talking, then no one is communicating with the group. “Private conversations” are out of order not only on the grounds of politeness and to ensure attention but also because they are disruptive and divisive. They tend to pull the group apart rather than to pull the group into a working unit. Caution: the side remark is often a snide remark, something cutting and uncomplimentary. Do not make the mistake of asking the offender to repeat his remarks aloud. If he is shamed into silence, he will have a grudge against you. If he is brash enough to repeat it aloud, his comment may disrupt the whole meeting. Try to make clear the rule of no “private conversations” at the start.
- RULE FIVE.** *No speeches.* Opinions may be freely expressed, but everyone is expected to be reasonably brief and not to monopolize the time. The group looks to the leader to enforce this fairly and rigidly.
- RULE SIX.** *No name calling or “personal” remarks.* Differences of opinion are to be expected. Indeed, such difference is the very life of the discussion. But angry disputation, name calling, and personal affronts are death to discussion.

From your experience as a group member you will recognize the necessity for the rules cited. In fact, you may have already drawn up your own list. If there are other points you think are essential, include them with those I have mentioned. But keep your list short. Too many rules and too complicated rules make the game more difficult than it need be. If you have not had much experience in conference discussion, commit these rules to memory. And this above all: keep strict watch upon yourself that you do not offend.

## CHAPTER 16

### WHEN TO USE THE CONFERENCE DISCUSSION METHOD

#### DISCUSSION NOT ALWAYS THE RIGHT METHOD

Whatever method or methods of communication you use should be suited to your purpose. But the advocates of discussion have made claims so extravagant that you may have been confused into thinking that discussion will answer all the ills of the world, cure every educational problem, and make wise men out of fools. Take this as your fundamental axiom: discussion is well suited to certain purposes for certain types of group meetings but discussion is a poor method for other purposes.

For example, discussion is a poor method for conveying information briefly and quickly to a large group. For this purpose a straight talk or a lecture is far better. If a question period is permitted following the lecture, opportunity is afforded to clear up any misunderstandings that the audience may have had. This question period is sometimes called "discussion," but a series of questions and answers, which is usual in such cases, is not "discussion" as we have been using the term throughout this book.

Again, discussion is a poor method for showing how something should be done. If it is your purpose to do this for your

group, then use demonstration, with perhaps a running commentary on the various steps as illustrated. This, followed by practice sessions where the group may demonstrate for themselves and to one another, can be recommended for the purpose of showing how something is done.

### SOME TYPES OF GROUPS

Whatever method of communication is used, the method should be suited to the purpose to be accomplished. Because purpose, as we saw in Chapter 2, is one of the keys to success in conference discussion, it will help you to examine certain types of groups and the purposes for which they come together.

Many groups come together for strictly social purposes: parties, teas, luncheons, gabfests, "a few friends in for the evening."

The fundamental purpose of such groups is to afford the individuals present a good time. There is no serious purpose, and indeed the person who becomes too serious at such a gathering is likely to be snubbed or hooted at as being "out of order." Because the purpose is to have a good time, the talk at such meetings is generally aimless, chatty, anecdotal, and altogether relaxing. It is conversation rather than discussion, and even if the "lion" of the occasion takes more than his fair share of attention, it does not matter so much as long as everyone is pleased and happy. It is usually a serious mistake to schedule a real discussion where the party atmosphere is likely to prevail.

Another type of group meeting, called a "conference," is the staff meeting called by the boss in order to explain certain things he wants understood or wants done. In such meetings as this, the talk is almost always one way—from boss to staff. Any questions that are asked are usually for clarification rather than com-

ments concerning what has been said. The purpose of the boss is to put over his ideas, to clarify policy, to explain what is to be done. Sometimes, even, the purpose is to stimulate action. The talk here is again not discussion as we have been using the term. This kind of talk we would do well to classify with the lecture, since the purpose is nearly the same. Although such meetings are called "conferences," to use that term in this way clearly stretches the meaning.

Upon what, then, does "conference discussion," as we have been using the term, depend? A useful guide is as follows: if what the group members say makes any difference in determining the outcome of the meeting, we may call the method "conference discussion." Thus, if the experience, ideas, and opinions of the individual members have any weight in definition and acceptance of policy or program of action, then conference discussion is the best method of accomplishing the purpose of obtaining group judgment. When trying to determine whether conference discussion is the method to use for a particular group meeting, ask yourself these questions: Does it make any difference what the group thinks? Does what the group has to say have any bearing on the outcome? If the answer is "yes," then conference discussion, as we have been illustrating its use, is the method indicated.

### THE OUTCOME PREDETERMINED

You will, of course, be thinking that you have seen "discussion" used where the outcome was predetermined by the leader or chairman, who adroitly seized upon the various contributions from the group, taking a bit from this one and a bit from that one and weaving the whole into a pattern which—as he proudly proclaims—"comes entirely from the group." But the ending

is just what he had had in his mind from the start. This kind of method is sometimes called "guided discussion," with the members gently "guided" into the channeled responses that the leader is already looking for. The interesting thing about this razzle-dazzle type of "discussion" is that it fools nobody except the leader. I have witnessed many a leader congratulating himself after such a group meeting, his feelings of success being quite contrary to the feelings of the group members as privately expressed. This kind of "guided discussion" is, to my way of thinking, a poor substitute for the more realistic—and more successful—methods of the persuader. Persuasion toward a recommended set of principles or course of action follows closely upon the pattern outlined in Chapter 10. Any deviations from that pattern are rarely sanctioned by the best practitioners of the art. Leaders of "guided discussion" who imagine that they have persuaded a group toward a predetermined outcome "which they themselves thought up" delude only themselves. The method may be successful with the very young and naïve; it is only laughable when tried with adults.

#### THE TRICKSTER TRICKED

You have not yourself been fooled, I am sure. You have said to yourself at such a meeting, "But that isn't what Harry said! He's twisting the meaning around to suit himself!" And you were right. It made little difference what the group members actually said, for the leader found a hint of what he wanted to find and proceeded to erect a structure by inference and innuendo.

Most adult group members are not fooled either. They soon come to understand whether what they think and feel makes any real difference in the outcome of the meeting. Although

they may play along with a "guided discussion," they are only playing along, without any vital concern and without talking "off the record." Once they suspect that they are being led by the nose they may become either resentful or facetious. In either case they will often say exactly the opposite from what they really think for the vindictive pleasure of seeing "the trickster tricked"—a comedy situation that mankind has enjoyed throughout the ages.

### WHAT THE GROUP SAYS

To sum up, then, "conference discussion" consists of an interchange of knowledge, experience, ideas, and opinions under informal circumstances. In this interchange the group has the final say as to what is important and how important it is, and as to what conclusions may be drawn. It may be that the fundamental purpose of the meeting is informative, as a meeting to hear and comment on reports from various field workers. It may be that the purpose of the meeting is to reach decisions, as a policy-determination meeting. It may be that the purpose is to compose differences of opinion. It may be to agree upon a program of action. In any of these cases, the primary responsibility is a group responsibility, shared equally by all the group members.

As leader of such a "conference discussion," you, too, have a definite responsibility. But your responsibility is not quite the same as that of the group members. Yours is to assist the group members, individually and as a whole, toward the accomplishment of group purpose—whatever it may be. Because you are somewhat apart from the actual discussion you are able to observe certain difficulties and complications as they arise. You are able to assist the group in steering around, say, per-

sonality clashes which might impede progress. Because you have carefully prepared for the meeting you are able to remind them of certain points that they may have overlooked. Not being in the thick of things, you are able to perceive when a misinterpretation or misinformation is keeping members apart. ("It was that word *must* that stuck in my craw!" Remember?) Not being completely mixed into the discussion and having no ax to grind yourself, you are able to perceive when others are "loading" their questions and comments toward predetermined ends. By gently insisting on getting down to cases you can help the group unload those "loaded" remarks. You may have to referee and rule certain kinds of remarks as out of bounds. A referee is always a better judge because he is not one of the players. And finally you can greatly assist the group toward accomplishment of their purpose by pointing out progress. Because you are the one to sit apart you can see that progress more easily than they can.

Just remember: not what you say but what the group says is what counts.



## CHAPTER 17

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### AN EFFECTIVE CONFERENCE DISCUSSION PLAN

#### A PLAN IS ESSENTIAL

You may have had the impression by what has been said so far that a discussion just grows, and that when “nice” people get together and behave well toward one another an effective meeting automatically results. Surely you know better than that. You know that there has to be some organization to the thought. You have been to meetings where a formal agenda has resulted in a cut-and-dried acceptance of the points raised, but you have also seen meetings where lack of organization has resulted in chaos. Some kind of plan is essential, and it depends entirely upon circumstances how formal a plan you wish to draw. In any case, it will help you considerably to have a plan written out before you. Whether you should have the plan typed up and copies before the group members you may determine by asking yourself how necessary it is to make the group aware of the proposed structure of the meeting. However formal or informal the meeting, however aware the group should be of the organization of the thinking, the basic elements of the discussion plan are the same. Take a blank sheet of paper

and a pencil and write down your thoughts and ideas on the various topics mentioned below.

### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

What is your topic? Write it down.

What is the purpose of the meeting? Write this down. Now take a minute or two to think about both the topic and the purpose as you have stated them. Are there any reasons why you think your statement of purpose might not be acceptable to the whole group? By this I mean, is there any reason for you to think that the group may have another purpose in mind than yours as you have stated it? If this is so, then begin reconciling the two purposes before you go any further. And reconcile your statement in favor of what you think might be the group purpose. Take time for this step, for it is important. Be careful not to assume that you know what is good for the group and what the group ought to want. So far as you can tell beforehand, what do they want? If you are wise you will not try to force your purpose on the group. You may be successful once, but if the group has any strength and if the members are articulate, you won't succeed a second time and you may even fail the first time.

Many meetings have been wrecked on these shoals—a conflict in purpose between the leader and the group. Remember: this is their meeting as much as yours. What do *they* want out of it?

Now go back and restate the topic in terms of the purpose you have arrived at. If necessary take a new sheet of paper and begin again: first a statement of the topic and second a statement of the purpose of the meeting.

### MOTIVATION

In your thinking about the group purpose it may have become clear to you that you don't know much about who will be present and why they are there. Be sure to find that out beforehand as fully as you can. Why are the individual members present at this particular meeting? Who selected them? Have they been appointed or elected by a larger group to represent them? Are they present for personal reasons—to gain more knowledge or for personal prestige? Have they been told to come? Only under exceptional circumstances can you assume that the members are present because they want to be there and would rather be there than anywhere else.

You should know something about why the members are there in order to know how to make the topic seem important to the group. You want the group to give their best. To do this the topic or the problem must seem important enough for them to take the time and make the necessary effort.

Ask yourself these questions: Why has the problem come up at this time? Why is it important *now*? How much of a stake has each one in the solution? To what desires and aspirations of each member can you appeal to obtain their interest and full co-operation? What you are asking and what your answers are will help you determine motivation. Write down the answers.

These answers will be useful in your introductory remarks at the opening of the meeting. You will want to arouse as fully as you can the interest of each member present. As we saw in Chapter 2 and Chapter 13, the interests of the members will be scattered. When they get to the meeting, they may still be

thinking about what was on their minds previously. They may have spent the first few minutes chatting and gossiping about purely personal affairs. Your job is to help focus not only their attention but also their interest. To do this you must give each person—so far as possible—a reason for being present and for taking upon himself the responsibility of helping the group find the answers.

It is not safe to assume these points, to assume that the members are properly motivated toward the job of co-operative thinking. This is your task, and the time you spend on it before the meeting will be time well spent.

### EXPLORATORY QUESTIONS

Your plan for the meeting now consists of three parts: first, a statement of the topic; second, a statement of the purpose of the meeting; and third, some comments and remarks that you intend making under the heading of motivation. Your fourth heading is exploratory questions to get the group started upon the task of analyzing the problem into its component parts. Here is where you get the members to contribute what they know about the problem. This is the Step Two of the "ideal" conference discussion (Chapter 13), and unless you remember exactly what was said there, perhaps you had better go back and read that part again. In your plan write down the questions that will help the group explore, analyze, and diagnose the situation. Write down, too, the questions that will help them get down to cases. It may help you in working out this part of your plan if you will ask yourself this question: What do we have to know in order to settle this problem? When you have made this analysis of the topic yourself, write down some of the subtopics developed in your exploration. With this outline

before you as the group talks you will be able to note whether important points have been overlooked by the members.

### TIME SCHEDULE

With the addition of a time schedule, there is not much more to be included in your plan. If you try to plan for solutions, even tentative solutions, in your own mind you will likely find yourself arguing for your ideas. But you must plan for a listing of solutions and for critical testing of solutions in your plan. And your time schedule will allow for these steps even though you do not write down your suggested solutions.

How much time should you allow for each step of the discussion? It is impossible to give a categorical answer, of course, but it is possible to give some indications which might be helpful to you. If you have carefully prepared your statement of the topic and purpose, if you have carefully thought out why the topic is important and what desires and interests to appeal to as for motivation, you should be able to take care of this relatively quickly. That is to say, Step One of the "ideal" conference should not consume more than about a tenth of the total time of the meeting. For Step Two, allow about four- or five-tenths of the total time. Step Three should again be fairly brief. Do you remember that we said it should be rapid-fire? Allow not more than a tenth for Step Three. Steps Four and Five are important enough to devote all the remaining time to. Put the notations as to time in the left margin of your plan sheet.

### PHYSICAL ARRANGEMENTS AND MATERIALS NEEDED

Although with the time schedule your plan is completed, your preparation for the meeting should include a notation concerning the physical arrangements necessary. Has the room

been selected and assigned for your meeting? Does everybody know where to meet? Are there enough chairs? Is there a large table in the room that you may sit around? Are the lights and ventilation satisfactory? Are there blackboard and chalk and erasers in the room?

Ask yourself also what materials may be needed. Are there special reports which will be used in the meeting and have these been prepared in sufficient copies? If informational materials like charts and maps are necessary, have they been prepared and are they available in the room when called for? There are few interruptions which hold up the group more than having to send for materials or reports which should have been on hand. (If this happens to you and if it is not too early in the meeting, suggest a five-minute "breather" while the materials are being sent for. Just to have the members sit around and wait for the needed charts almost invariably results in a slackening of interest and enthusiasm.)

The main elements of your plan of the meeting, then, include:

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <i>Time</i> | 1. Introduction of members—if necessary                             |
|             | 2. Statement of Topic<br>(Put in question form to provoke interest) |
| 1/10        | 3. Statements of Purpose<br>(As you understand it)                  |
|             | 4. Motivation<br>(Why is the topic important—now?)                  |
| 4/10-5/10   | 5. Exploratory Questions<br>(Write out thought-provoking questions) |
| 1/10        | 6. Solutions on Blackboard  |
| 3/10-4/10   | 7.-8. Study of Solutions and Decision                               |
|             | 9. Assignment of Action Responsibility                              |
|             | 10. Materials and Reports Necessary<br>(Make list and check off).   |

## CHAPTER 18

### CHECKING UP ON RESULTS

#### DID YOU ACCOMPLISH THE GROUP PURPOSE?

Did you and the group get what all of you were after? Was the meeting a "success"? What are some of the ways in which you can measure the results of your efforts as leader?

These are questions you will be asking yourself after the meeting is over, and, provided you study out the reasons and seek to do better next time, you can profit as much from an unsuccessful meeting as from a good one. Perhaps even more.

Take first the purpose of the meeting. Was your statement of purpose in your plan an accurate forecast of the purpose as the group understood it? As the meeting progressed did you and the group have to restate the purpose? Was the final statement of purpose generally agreed upon by all the members? Let us suppose that your purpose was to reach some decisions. If so, exactly what decisions were reached? Were these concurred in generally by most of the group? Were arrangements made for carrying out these decisions into action? And finally, were arrangements made for reporting back to the group the results of actions agreed upon? As far as purpose is concerned, the answers to these questions ought to be "yes," and you

should be able to write out the results in brief, concise statements.

But do the group members feel the same as you do about the results? I think you will be able to answer this by observing closely the reactions of the various individuals. Physical expressions of satisfaction are not hard to interpret. If the group members are highly pleased, some will be sure to say so. Others may express their satisfaction by smiles and nods of agreement. If they are pleased, there will be a general feeling of relief and some enthusiasm manifest toward the action program as assigned to various members. The meeting may have been a grueling session full of tensions, and at the close the members may be tired. If there is agreement, however, they will still be alert, with heads erect and eyes bright and smiling.

If there has been no agreement, if the members feel irritated and frustrated, if they feel bewildered and confused, they will manifest their feelings unmistakably. Although they may not actually say aloud such remarks as "I still don't know what this is all about," you will be able to read their comments by their puzzled frowns, by their drooping shoulders, by their averted eyes, by their silence, by their reluctant footsteps in leaving the room. Even though you may feel happy and contented about the meeting yourself, be careful not to project your own reactions. Be as objective as possible in reading the reactions of the group.

### WAS IT "THEIR" MEETING OR YOURS?

Another criterion for judging the value of the meeting is the amount of interest displayed and the extent of participation. Whether the members are interested or not is almost entirely dependent upon the motivation you have given them in your



opening remarks. If the meeting was slow in starting, if the members took a long time in "warming up," if the discussion was desultory, then you may trace the fault back not to them but to yourself. Something was wrong in your presentation. They did not feel that the problem was real. They did not feel vitally concerned. It wasn't their problem or else they were not convinced that they could actually accomplish any solutions.

Think back over your opening remarks. What could you have said which you did not say that might have awakened their interest and enthusiasm? How could you have brought them to feel that the problem was important to them and at this time? Did you suggest why the problem had come up? Did you suggest various ways in which each member was personally concerned? Did you look Bill right in the eye when mentioning his special interests and did you remember to refer to Hazel's special report on the situation?

Just how long did you actually talk in introducing the subject? Refer to your time schedule. You may have allotted, say, five minutes. Did you time yourself? Were you surprised to discover that you took more than the allotted time? Or less? I do not mean that you should stick rigidly to any preconceived time schedule, but I do mean that the amount of time allotted to this part of the meeting may have been wrong. Your opening remarks may have been too brief to have been effective in capturing their attention and focusing it upon the problem. Remember that they came into the meeting full of their own concerns. On the other hand, I have seen many conferences ruined because the chairman talked too long. In such cases, the reaction of the group members was that he had said everything there was to say so what was the use of their talking. Ask yourself this question: Did I make the members feel that this

was *their* meeting, *their* problem, *their* responsibility, and the answers that counted *theirs*?

Concerning the extent of participation, you might ask yourself whether every member had the opportunity to say as much as he wished. Some persons are just less vocal than others and so will talk less even though there is ample opportunity to do so. This does not necessarily mean that they are not actively participating. You should be wary of trying too hard to draw them out. Give them the chance to speak if they wish, and encourage them when they do, for they will speak up if sufficiently aroused and interested.

### HOW GOOD WAS THE TALK?

Amount or extent of participation is not an accurate guide, however, to effective results. Granted that each should be accorded the opportunity to talk, a more important criterion is the quality rather than the quantity of talk. But quality is much harder to judge—which, I imagine, is why it is so often disregarded. How are you to estimate the quality of the discussion?

Turn your attention toward Step Two, the analysis of the problem, for here is one area in which you may search for quality. Ask yourself these questions: Were the analysis and exploration and diagnosis reasonably complete? Were most of the factors underlying the problem brought out? Were most of the questions and comments relevant? Was it fairly easy for them (with or without your guidance) to keep to the subject in hand? Were they able to get down to specific cases and specific examples reasonably quickly? Were these examples really on the point? Were the various members aware of what they did not know and of what must be ascertained before solutions

could be offered? If you are able to answer "yes" to all these questions, I suggest you go back over the meeting again in your mind, for you have had an extraordinary success indeed. However, you should be able to answer "yes" to many such questions.

In Step Four, where occurs the critical testing of the implications and probable results of various solutions offered, you have another fruitful area for studying the quality of the discussion. It may be that the solution hit upon was almost inevitable from the preceding analysis, or it may be that the final solution was painfully hammered out from a careful study of end results and purposes. In any event, what the members said here was a test of the quality of their thinking. Not only that but also a test of their ability to think together. If Step Four was passed over rather hurriedly and impatiently, the meeting was not so successful as you would wish. A wrong decision means that the problem is going to recur again and again. A right decision—provided the proper action program follows—effectively disposes of the problem. Is the original problem going to keep bobbing up?

### WORKING TOGETHER IS WHAT COUNTS

As you are well aware, there is considerable difference between a group of adults and what might be called an "adult" group. You know that age alone is no sign of a mature individual. You know that grownups are sometimes more childish than their children. But a gathering of mature and adult individuals does not always result in a good group discussion simply because the members may not have learned the techniques of thinking together and working together to accomplish a common purpose. Those who have successfully directed their own

lives and are used to making decisions for themselves are likely to be in the habit of making or recommending decisions for others. The most articulate members are often impatient with the painful and slow utterances of others. Differences of opinion, differences of temperament, and differences of background and training arise as almost insuperable barriers. In their private lives such persons are prone to "agree to disagree" and to go on with their own concerns. Indeed, to "agree to disagree" is usually thought of as a mark of maturity. But such an attitude makes for unconcern rather than concern and for disinterest rather than interest. For the process of co-operative thinking in conference discussion such attitudes and such differences are the mark of immaturity and not maturity.

A group of individuals genuinely interested in working together to solve a problem will have to live with and make use of their differences as well as their similarities. Such differences of background, opinion, and temperament appear formidable but they cannot be escaped. Further, such differences help make the problem real and vital, for it must take them into account. What I am trying to say is that in this America of ours we do not want strict uniformity. Partly because of diversity is our country great, for diversity is a challenge and a stimulation to creative endeavor. Our most real and vital problems in our national life cut squarely across diverse groups and interests. To solve such problems we must not close our eyes to differences and shrug them off with unconcern. We must rather become aware of differences and utilize the many strengths implicit there to work with united effort toward solving our problems.

In like manner, though in microcosm, in a conference discussion the individuals must become aware of differences and seek to work with those differences rather than to gloss them

over and ignore them. A group that can do this is an "adult" group.

An "adult" group will not "agree to disagree" but will seek to reconcile dissonances into a harmonious whole. The blatant blaring trumpet is needed in an orchestra to contrast with and blend with the smooth purring of the violins. The slight rasp of the oboe blends beautifully with the dulcet sweetness of the flute. The sharp ting of the triangle is needed as well as the ominous roll of the kettledrums. The deep, measured voices of the double basses mark the sure and steady progress from dissonance and dissolution into resolution and harmony.

How good an "orchestra" is your group? How well can they play *together* rather than separately? There is a time for soloing and a time for virtuosity and individual performance. A conference discussion is a time for orchestrating. At a first meeting there may be as many different interpretations of key, tempo, rhythm, and even of pitch as there are members present at the conference. By the end of several meetings, however, they should have learned something of playing together.

Let me ask you once again: *How good an orchestra is your group?*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Now that you have finished reading this book, you are well aware that it could hardly have been written without the assistance of many persons. No one is more conscious than I that the ideas I have freely used are from many sources. I wish to express my thanks and acknowledge my indebtedness.

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